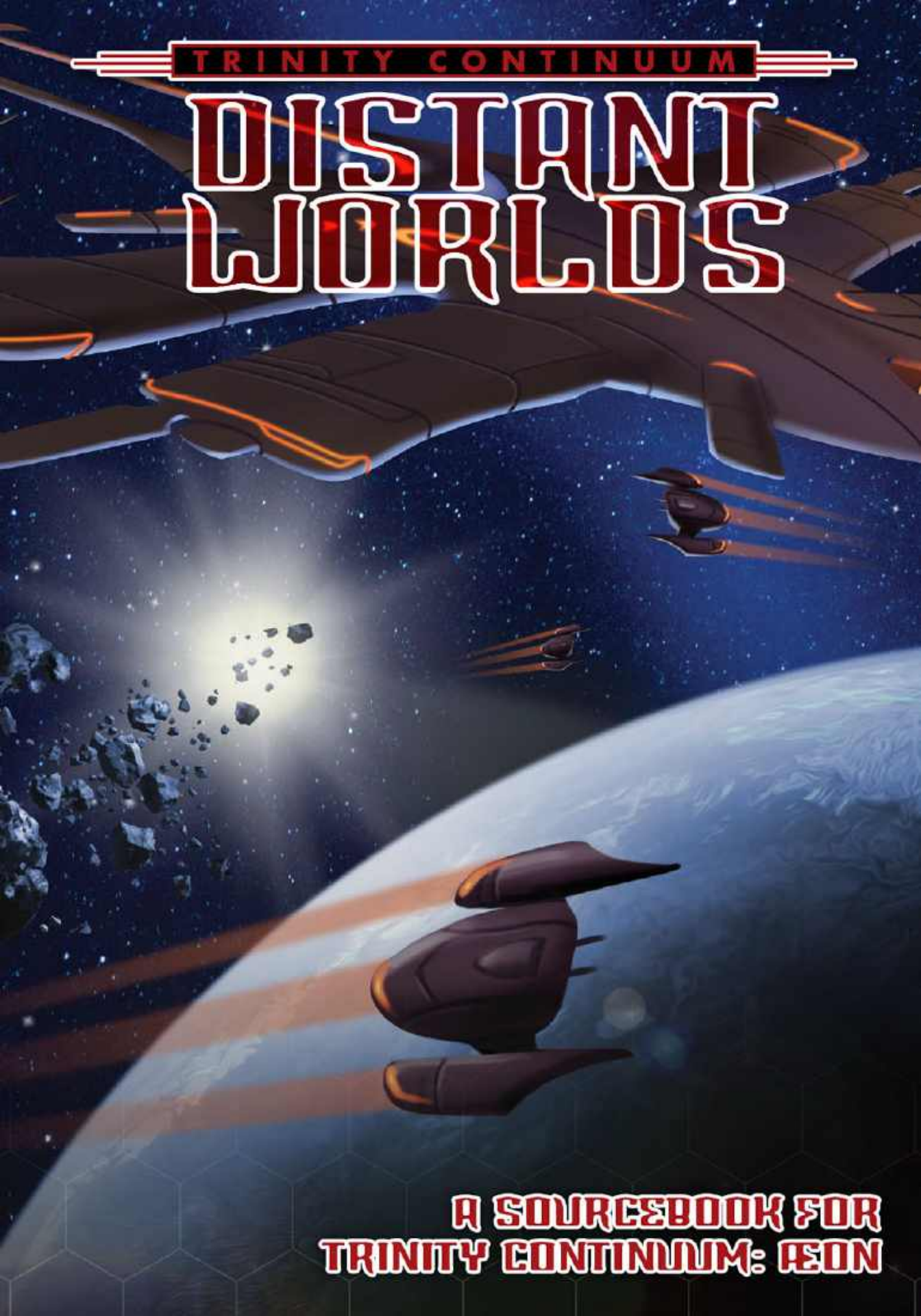
TRINITY CONTINUUM

# DISTANT WORLDS



A SOURCEBOOK FOR TRINITY CONTINUUM: ÆON

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# DISTANT WORLDS

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# THE BEACON

The *Aventura* ripped through the planet's atmosphere. The crew braced their bodies against their seats as super-heated plasma whipped around the exterior of their exploration vessel, rocking the small spacecraft. *Only a few seconds more*, Chief Engineer Tamiko Wray thought to herself with nervous excitement as she gripped the arms of her seat. Though the process of reentry was nothing new to the seasoned spacefarer, it was never routine. In the span of several quaking breaths the furious shaking ceased and the Aventura sailed into the open stratosphere. Through the ship's window, the crew caught sight of a sprawling, dense landscape lush with vibrant yellows, mottled with purples and blots of orange, and sparkling blues, the view dappled in places by shifting splashes of clouds. The approaching continent teemed with life, completely unknown, alien life.

With deft precision, their pilot stabilized the craft and brought it to a gentle landing on the glimmering, sapphire surface of an enormous lake. Designed for amphibious landings, the Aventura deployed its buoyancy systems and the spaceship transformed itself into a sea-faring vessel in a matter of moments. The glistening, chitinous exoskeleton of the ship shifted from a streamlined spacefaring vessel and deployed buoyant sacs along its underside. In hushed silence, the crew sailed the ship towards a spur of promising land. Wisps of steam parted before the passage of the craft and where the sun's rays reached the water, a tangle of thick vegetation appeared beneath its placid surface. Between wide leaves, tiny creatures not unlike fish darted, pursued by menacing predators. The visitors traveled in reverent silence, awed by their surroundings.

The captain turned to her chief of scientific exploration once they were within personal craft traveling distance from the shoreline. "Begin the atmospheric scan if you would, Dr. Kamau."

Tamiko watched Dr. Kamau nod with enthusiasm and turn her attention to the lit screen before her, tapping prompts in rapid succession. She pictured the flitting movement of the surveyor drones that set about reading the ambient temperature, scanning the molecular content of the air, and taking a few samples of the water beneath them, and smiled at the thought. A few moments of processing and the display at Dr. Kamau's fingertips chimed.

"Good news," she said brightly, "the air is breathable if a bit more humid than we're used to and the water sample is teeming with microorganisms. We'll have our hands full studying everything this planet has to offer."

"Suit up," Captain Laurel Ruth ordered. "While the air might be breathable, who knows what else we might encounter."

The mood brightened by their safe landing and promising discovery, the crew of the Aventura set immediately to donning their sealed exploration suits and gathered brushed-steel cases loaded with data collection tools. Before disembarking from the ship, Tamiko double-checked the charges on her flashlight and camera, unwilling to risk missing an opportunity to capture the images of anything valuable or fascinating. Once everyone had checked and stowed their gear, the team of explorers and scientists set the first human feet onto the surface of the planet.

At the shoreline the water turned murky as their passage churned up mud and silt from the bottom of the lake. Tangling stalks of submarine plant life slowed their movements, further compounded by the scientists pausing every few steps to collect samples of algal blooms and clip leaves from marine plants.

While the rest of the scientists busied themselves with specimen collection, Tamiko split from the group to explore ahead. She walked a few paces away from the cluster of excited biologists, nudging sharp and tangling underbrush aside with the end of a telescoping pole. Something metallic and glimmering caught her attention as its flashing reflection cut across the trunks of the tall, slender trees. Tamiko squinted, unable to see whatever it was with her naked eyes, and raised a pair of field binoculars. Though them she made out the outline of what she guessed to be a building of intelligent construction, its angles far too precise and intentional to have happened naturally. Thrilled, she turned on her heel and rushed back to the group.

"Captain," she cried, breathless, "Captain, I've spotted something incredible. There's a *building* up ahead."

"A building?" the captain asked, "I thought all reports and analysis indicated this planet was uninhabited."

"It's too precise to be just a rock formation, and it was reflecting like as if there were polished metal surfaces. Tell everyone to quit what they're doing and let's go look. The mud will still be here when we come back."

Captain Ruth glanced between Tamiko and the scientists. "If this is what you think it is, this could be huge. We can gather samples later."

After collecting their things and few sidelong glares from Dr. Kamau, the crew of the Aventura pressed on through the forest, following the trail blazed by Tamiko. The trek stretched through more wooded area than the crew anticipated and when they finally reached the clearing within sight of the building, the sun had dipped towards the horizon.

Before them, the angled walls of the building sloped towards the cloudy sky. Its surface was composed of quadrilateral tiles made of some sort of off-white material, with the topmost panels made of a different, reflective material reminiscent of chrome. If the structure had any windows, they were not outwardly discernable. The crew worked their way slowly around the perimeter, scanning the lowermost panels for anything that looked like an entryway or displayed alien writing. Around the seam between bottom panels and the next highest layer read an inscription of indecipherable glyphs. Tamiko pulled a minicomp from her pocket and snapped a few pictures of it for study later.

"Are you sure this is a building?" the captain asked as she squinted up towards the reflective top layer.

"Obviously not," Tamiko replied and traced her finger along the glyphs, "it could be a monument, or some other edifice of religious significance. Maybe we can find a way in... if there is one."

Dr. Kamau pressed her hand to the side of the structure and concentrated. "This was once inhabited. Whoever used to live here did...some kind of scientific work within this building, but they looked nothing like us — they were bigger too."

"Over here!" a scientist shouted from a few feet ahead. She beckoned with excitement, urging the rest of the crew to meet her. "I think I've found exactly what you're looking for."

They clustered around a section of the wall where one of the tiles had succumbed to the ravages of time, crumbling inward into a pile of rubble. Beyond the yawning space in the wall stretched a hallway, dusty from disuse and overgrown with reaching, snaring vines blown in by the breeze.

After a long, awed silence, Tamiko said, "Guess that's our way in."

The captain stepped forward and nudged some of the crumbled debris away from the entrance with the toe of her boot. She took another step, carefully maneuvering around a chunk of rock and glanced back over her shoulder at the team. "Turn your lights on and stick close together."

"Keep your helmets on," Dr. Kamau urged, "who knows what kind of mold or alien gas leak might be floating in the air within. Let's not come this far just to suffocate in an old building."

The team pulled on their gear and in formation ventured into the dark unknown. Past the reach of sunlight, clinging plant life vanished, leaving only the sterile walls and dust-coated floor. The wan light from their flashlights passed over fading script, long-dead light fixtures, and doors with no obvious mechanism to open them. Rather than stairwells, the long hallway made a ninety-degree turn into a ramp that led to another floor. Without a moment's hesitation, the crew of the Aventura clambered upwards. Dr. Kamau snapped holos of the slope and writings and made a note in her tablet to further investigate for signs of what kind of physiology the original inhabitants may have had. Unwilling to risk damage from physical touch, she asked her assistant, Dr. Alverez, to float samples into the small orbit of specimen containers he had telekinetically arrayed around himself.

Before them, the second floor splayed out — a series of labyrinthine passages winding in precise geometric patterns, each feeding into another ramp with access to the next floor above. At the top of the ramp, more script in peeling paint directed visitors left, right, and upwards, though none of the crew could interpret where they were going. Captain Ruth turned to her team, "What do you think? Continue upwards and see what's at the very top, or stop to explore here?"

"I saw something reflective at the top," Tamiko said, "so I vote we go all the way to the top. Maybe we can figure out what this place was meant for once we get up there."

Dr. Kamau looked at her notes but hesitantly agreed. "The vantage point might reveal other places of interest for study."

Laurel smiled. "Onwards and upwards!"

Silence fell over the group again as the climbed upwards. After each consecutive floor, the outer walls drew inward as the trapezoidal building narrowed towards the top. The penultimate floor herded the crew shoulder-to-shoulder in musty darkness, their flashlight beams muted against each other's backs. A sealed door at the end of the ramp halted any further progress.

While the others searched the outline of the door for buttons or switches to press or flick, Tamiko took a step back and studied the outline. She tried to imagine the kind of creature that would build a structure without stairs and what kind of body it might have. A human would put the mechanism right beside the door, naturally, but Dr. Kamau said these forgotten inhabitants were larger, or maybe longer. She snapped her fingers and began blinking away from the group — vanishing from one location and appearing a moment later in the other — until she found a recessed section of the wall. Tamiko closed her hand into a fist and pressed against the indented tile as though she were pressing it with a thicker appendage.

The hissing sound of the door flying open followed by the surprised cries of her compatriots echoed down the hallway. Though the visor of her helmet Tamiko grinned back at her team. Captain Ruth stared in surprise at the open room, then back at the engineer before flashing an approving gesture.

What stretched before them was a perfectly preserved control room, illuminated by fading sunlight through dirty glass that made up the roof. Before each station stood a stool-like object with a curved seat waiting for the original inhabitants of this planet to return and resume their work. The seat of each stool rose about four feet into the air, level with the base of each panel.

Tamiko ran a hand along the inert control and admired their strange shapes, trying to piece together what was a screen, what might have been a keyboard, and the original purposes of the other knobs and dials. She imagined herself sitting in that stool, using this technology to control who-knows-what. A thought struck her — could this possibly work like the door?

Like before she looked for another recessed area of the board, perhaps even one labeled with the ancient writing. Tamiko spotted something that looked enough like the door's panel to try her unorthodox method once more and pressed her fist into it, hoping it would yield beneath her weight. To her pleasant surprise, it did.

A thrumming sound reverberated through the room as every surface and panel came suddenly alight with one final burst of energy. Alien script scrolled across flashing screens, delivering their warning messages to recipients unable to understand. Another message popped up in front of Tamiko, its text scrolling in front of her before coming to an abrupt halt as if anticipating input. It offered two options that she guessed were likely yes or no, confirm or cancel, something like that. Having no context for the language's syntax she gave in to the whim of her curiosity and tapped the response she hoped was "yes" with a gloved finger.

All the screens immediately turned blank, filling the room with glaring white light. From the ground floor upwards there rose a shuddering, rolling motion as the whole building lit with a last gasp of remaining power. The reflective windows opened upwards and extended higher and higher, pointing some sort of beacon towards the vastness of space. With a great hum of machinery, the final signal tower projected its long-forgotten message into the sky.

# INTRODUCTION

We have always looked to the stars to discover who we are.
— Michael Burnham

**Trinity Continuum: Æon** is set in the first decades of humanity's expansion to the stars. Before they went mad, a few novas engaged in sporadic interstellar exploration and colonization, but nothing like a systematic or sustained era of exploration. The Aberrant War ended these early efforts and left several human colonies cut off from any chance of contact with Earth. However, since 2105, the teleporters of the Upeo wa Macho have been exploring the cosmos, and now the Æon Trinity is using its Leviathan jump ships to perform its own missions of discovery. Today, humanity is learning more about the worlds it has previously visited, discovering lost colonies settled in the Nova Age, as well as finding and exploring dozens of new worlds.

Ultimately, **Distant Worlds** is a book about discovery. In addition to the known dangers of monstrous Aberrants, warlike Chromatics, and the looming threat of the Coalition, out among the stars unknown menaces await, as well as equally mysterious wonders, and invaluable treasures. Explorers can discover previously unknown mysteries lurking on recently settled planets like Averiguas or Far Nyumba, as well as the amazing and sometimes terrifying wonders waiting for the daring humans who first set foot on new worlds.

Most explorers seek habitable planets suitable for colonization or new, hopefully friendly, intelligent alien species who can become humanity's trading partners, and perhaps allies. Also, many hope that they will stumble upon the ruins of an advanced alien civilization that can provide humanity with powerful new technologies or perhaps discover valuable alien plants or animals. However, explorers can also encounter deadly life forms, ruins containing ancient threats, hostile intelligent aliens, or simply worlds containing subtle dangers that swiftly slay the unwary. One of the truths of the cosmos is that there are countless planets and each one is utterly unique, with its own mix of wonders and dangers. The only way to truly understand what mysteries and threats are waiting on a world and what it can offer humanity is to visit it. Telescopes and clairsentient observation reveal the basic details about a world, and drones provide somewhat more information, but there's no substitute for standing on a planet and looking to see precisely what's waiting there.

Storytellers can use all of the worlds described in this book, including both familiar worlds like Far Nyumba or Khantze Lu Ge, and the new ones like Skete or Yarran, in one of two ways. In a campaign where the characters frequently travel from one planet to another, the characters might visit each planet for a single scenario, or even a single game session. In this type of campaign, the characters can experience the vast diversity of worlds, each of which has its own distinctive characteristics and unique wonders and dangers. By the time the characters learn the basics of this world, it's time for them to travel to an entirely new planet, where they must again confront the many differences between it and all previous worlds they've visited.

Alternately, each of the worlds described in this book can also serve as the basis for an entire campaign. The characters might be colonists on Far Nyumba, researchers on Bullseye or Ivdel, diplomats and support staff on Eden, Qinshui, or Skete, soldiers on Chrome Prime or Khantze Lu Ge, a first contact teams on Yarran, or one of many similar options on any of these planets. In this type of campaign, the particular planet and its life and inhabitants, if any, are the backdrop for a multitude of different scenarios.

This type of campaign emphasizes the specifics of a single world, and that each planet described in this book is as complex, strange, and wonderful as Earth, and has a wealth of mysteries, wonders, and dangers that the characters can encounter. Regardless of whether the characters are exploring a world, engaged in a mission to perform some task there, or have been marooned and are struggling to survive, in this second sort of campaign the details of the world should help affect and shape all of the characters' interactions there.

**Distant Worlds** goes a step beyond providing new alien mysteries, alien worlds, and alien species for characters to encounter. It also contains rules and advice for creating and playing alien characters. The Qin are an alien species

that humanity has a close alliance with, but who possess both their own agenda and their own secrets. This book reveals these secrets and goals, and provides rules for playing them. While they appear human when wearing their biosuits, Qin are profoundly alien creatures whose biology and physicality is vastly different from our own. These rules provide adventurous players and Storyguides with a chance to create scenarios around individual Qin interacting with humanity, or possibly even an entire group of Qin with their own goals, who find humanity to be both potentially useful, and a possible threat.

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Welcome to **Distant Worlds**. This book is a supplement for **Trinity Continuum: Æon** and requires it to use. **Distant Worlds** provides descriptions of 18 extrasolar planets, including nine which are new to this book. It also includes rules for creating and playing the alien Qin, as well as a variety of new rules and devices that are useful for space travel.

## CHAPTERS

**Chapter One: Worlds Revisited** provides a wealth of information about eight worlds humanity has already visited or settled, including Averiguas, Far Nyumba, and Bullseye. This chapter reveals mysteries about these worlds that no human has yet uncovered, while also provided more information about life in the settlements on these worlds.

**Chapter Two: New Worlds to Explore** includes detailed information about the Chromatic homeworld that humanity has christened Chrome Prime, but has yet to visit. In addition, it also includes descriptions of three Nova Age colonies that no one from Earth has visited in decades, as well as six recently discovered worlds, including one that is home to a new intelligent species that has just made first contact with humanity.

**Chapter Three: New Technologies and Additional Rules** contains a wealth of new technology, including additional human technologies for use in space, as well as additional Qin biotech, with descriptions of both devices they are selling to humanity and those that they make for their own use. In addition, this chapter contains several dozen alien artifacts explorers can discover, as well as new Paths and new Edges specifically for extrasolar explorers and colonists.

**Chapter Four: The Qin** concludes this book by providing detailed information about humanity's first alien allies, the Qin. This chapter includes more about the Qin, their interstellar colony worlds, and their wondrous biosuits, as well as rules for creating Qin characters suitable for play and suggestions and guidelines for including these Qin characters in campaigns where most characters are human. This chapter also includes guidelines for creating campaigns where most or all the characters are Qin.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following works showcase the sense of wonder and mystery inherent to interstellar exploration, while also showcasing its dangers and hardships.

## FILMS

*Arrival (2017):* An utterly amazing and powerful story of alien contact where the focus is on communication and the profound power of language.

*Avatar (2009):* A problematic film in that the aliens need a white man to save them, but also an utterly gorgeous exploration of a strange and wondrous alien planet filled with ancient mysteries.

*The Martian (2015):* A well done film about the difficulties of surviving on a hostile alien planet.

## BOOKS

*Expedition,* by Wayne Barlowe: A book of amazing art about a profoundly alien planet that is written as an exploration of this unique world. If you want to see just how strange an alien world might be, this book is essential.

*Cycle of Fire,* by Hal Clement: Unique alien biology and an equally unusual planet are central to this novel about human contact with atypical aliens, and a stranded human explorer's struggle to survive in this world and contact his companions.

*Midworld,* by Alan Dean Foster: Unlike most of his relatively light space opera novels, this work describes a primitive lost human colony on a hellish and terrifying jungle planet, and the efforts by an explorer to survive there and contact these humans.

*Deception Well,* by Linda Nagata: A story of ancient alien mysteries on a poorly explored and potentially deadly colony world.

*Warlock,* by Andre Norton: Characters struggle to survive on an alien world and to contact strange, extremely reclusive aliens with impressive psychic powers. This compilation includes two novels — Storm Over Warlock and Ordeal in Otherwhere.

*Binti, Binti: Home, and Binti: The Night Masquerade,* by Nnedi Okorafor: Alien contact with strange biotech-using aliens leads to discoveries of ancient mysteries on Earth.

*The Wrong Stars and The Dreaming Stars,* by Tim Pratt: After learning the aliens that gave them the stars lied to them, a group of humans attempt to explore the dangers lurking in the places the aliens keep humanity from going.

*The Color of Distance,* by Amy Thompson: Stranded on a deadly alien world, a scientist only survives because the seemingly primitive aliens drastically modify her. This novel has some of the best alien biology I've seen.

CHAPTER ONE

# WORLDS REVISITED

The time was fast approaching when Earth, like all mothers, must say farewell to her children.
— Arthur C. Clarke

Humanity recently established the three colonies of Averiguas, Far Nyumba, and Karroo, and built large bases on both Bullseye and Ruan's World. In addition, psions have visited, and in two cases contacted older colonies on Eden, Khantze Lu Ge, and Marfisa. These six colonies and two bases are humanity's primary outposts beyond the solar system. Although Averiguas is a harsh world plagued with unrest, Khantze Lu Ge is in the midst of a battle for survival against hideous Aberrant invaders, and Marfisa is in a cold war that could easily turn hot, these worlds and bases represent humanity's hope for the future, and in time most could grow into self-sufficient colonies that will insure humanity's place in the galaxy. For basic information on these worlds and settlements, see **Trinity Continuum: Æon, Extrasolar Settlements**, pp. 95-119).

# AVERIGUAS

Home can be many things to many people; for the colonists of Averiguas, home is a dry rocky landscape barely capable of sustaining life, where living conditions are just this side of bearable, and where the government wants most of them gone.

Claimed and settled by Brazil, Averiguas has a large population of European and Nordamerican workers who saw the extrasolar colony as a chance to start anew and build a home when their own lay in ruins. The appalling working and living conditions pushed these workers towards rebellion, and the conflict would have ended quickly, one way or another, if not for the isolation brought on by the disappearance of the Upeo wa Macho.

After recontact, the situation is even more complicated than it was before. The years when circumstances forced loyalists and rebels to work together only put their differences on hold. While people on both sides built bridges and found common ground, the arrival of new personnel from Earth is pulling the conflict in multiple directions, and a fair diplomatic solution seems increasingly unlikely.

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Although capable of sustaining life, Averiguas is mostly barren. Gravity is only a little higher than Earth's, as are average temperatures throughout the settled zone, but overall humidity is low and localized and the only native species are lichens that cling to the rocky surface.

This makes for a dismal landscape not unlike the deserts of Earth, except for the twin suns that pummel Averiguas' dry surface. The orange of the largest sun dominates over the smaller yellow star, giving a light that is slightly more toward the red spectrum than Sol.

Averiguas' atmosphere is also slightly denser than Earth's and the sky has a slight cyan cast that differentiates it from Earth's pure blue.

Visitors characterize Averiguas' conditions as "just like Earth, only more so" to describe the slight environmental differences that can make recent arrivals anxious or irritable as they acclimate.

The days are dry and warm, and while the Averiguas day lasts almost as long as Earth's, the light of the binary stars make it seem like dusk sets in much earlier. With no vegetation other than lichens clinging to the humid areas of the planet and minimal axial tilt, temperature at night only descends a handful of degrees, and there are no seasons.

The oceans are small and host the widest variety of life, but all of it is microorganisms. A few rivers cross the surface, but they have few and short tributaries, leaving most of the planet's surface without a ready source of water. The terrain around the settled area is flat, with a few crags and dry ravines. Around 50 kilometers north there is a group of eroded mesas, while in the south the dirt is looser, without ever becoming sand.

## LIFE IN THE ROUGH

The workers' uprising started just before the teleporters vanished, cutting the colony off from Earth. This prevented violence from escalating as cool

heads prevailed, but not before the rebels captured the settlement of New Hope and split the population between the rebels, who organized under the Workers' Council, and the Brazil loyalists, who were "exiled" to Justica, the other major settlement where Brazil built a military base.

Both settlements had enough hydroponic farms to sustain their populations, although during the first few months New Hope traded food for hardware while Justica grew into a town proper out of its original purpose as a headquarters.

Because farms, production facilities, and research laboratories existed in and near both New Hope and Justica, working alongside the opposition became a regular part of colony life. Rebels and loyalists shared workspaces, eating areas, and recreational activities, and as long as nobody started talking about politics, there was peace, even if the atmosphere was a little tense, especially around members of Norça and the Brazilian military.

## STIRRING THE POT

When the Workers' Council organized, their early victories fueled their idealism and enthusiasm. They wrote a makeshift constitution and sketched regulations, and now they vote openly to choose the nine members of the Council to represent them. Juliet Navarone, a French electronics technician and outspoken activist, acts as a spokeswoman and de facto leader for the Council, and was instrumental in brokering a working relationship with both the Norça and the Brazilian military.

However, as time passed the realities of managing a problematic settlement arose. The Workers' Council is beginning to suffer from growing pains, and dissent among its ranks threatens to complicate things even more. The major internal issue the Council is dealing with is the new Brazilian governor. Most of the Council wants to reach a peaceful agreement, but a couple members are pushing for renewed violence to force their point across.

## BACK INTO THE FOLD

The recontact mission was a mixed blessing: it brought much needed supplies, fresh personnel, and return trips for those willing and able to go back to Earth. But it also brought Josefa Cristobal, the new governor, who intends to quash the rebellion and return Averiguas to full Brazilian control, and has none of the solidarity born of shared struggles the previous governor had with the rebels.

The door was also open for Colombian agitators who would like nothing better than to force Brazil to share their stake in the extrasolar colony, and for the Interstellar Laborers Association (ILA), who are determined to protect the workers' rights, and are not averse to organizing protests and demonstrations.

In the middle of this boiling pot of conflicting interests, the Æon Trinity delegation is doing their best to mediate, devoting both neutrals and psions to make inquiries and interviews, and to attempt to facilitate talks between Governor Cristobal and the Workers' Council.

The Norça stand on both sides of the issue, literally. While their top priority is to conduct and protect their order's interests, some operatives, including half of the new arrivals, actively and openly support the Workers' Council. Major Martín Vargas, the commanding officer of the Norça, advises sympathizers of both sides to remember their first allegiance, and to avoid participating in any open confrontation, lest they come to fight one another, one of the shifters' strictest unwritten taboos.

## STRAINED EVERYDAY LIFE

Everyday life in Averiguas is back to a normal routine. Farmers tend to their hydroponic crops in the various farms in New Hope, Justica, and their surroundings, while miners struggle to extract the planet's mineral riches, although work conditions are vastly better than when Brazil had full control of the colony.

Brazilian pharmaceutical companies are back on schedule on their laboratories, with field technicians collecting samples of the native lichens and microorganisms, and the technicians employed by the government and private interests are back to working on maintenance with fresh parts and tools, rather than making miracles with scavenging and jury-rigging.

Although the official language of the colony is Portuguese, the Workers' Council and the Brazilian government agreed on Spanish as a common language for negotiations, as everyone spoke at least a little Spanish thanks to their neighboring countries or territories. Americans are the largest immigrant demographic, followed by the French and Venezuelans.

## NEW HOPE

The largest and original settlement of the colony is firmly under control of the Workers' Council and has Averiguas' main spaceport. The mayor is Meredith

Buchanan, an Irish engineer. Buchanan is among those who want a quick reconciliation with the Brazilian government, and during the isolation she hopped between New Hope and Justica for maintenance duties, so she has the trust of both rebels and loyalists, except for the newest arrivals. She also secretly keeps in contact with Norça's Major Vargas and is trying to secure the shifters' support to the Council's cause.

Another of Buchanan's initiatives is the consolidation of a security force under the Workers' Council, which started as a volunteer militia but is now aiming for legitimacy thanks to the training provided by a couple of Norça operatives who sided with the rebels. With the provisional name of "WorkSec," these well-intentioned amateurs handle port security and law enforcement in New Hope, but their lack of experience already allowed violent dissidents to assault a Legion psion, as well as unknowingly admitting industrial spies from Colombia and Peru masquerading as employees of private companies with interests in Averiguas.

The Æon Trinity keeps a diplomatic mission in New Hope. It is smaller than their main presence in Justica, and its mission is to liaise with the Workers' Council and oversee humanitarian concerns. In practice, this mission exists to ensure that Governor Cristobal doesn't launch a surprise raid on the rogue settlement. Manu Edvardsson, the mission's lead diplomat, coordinates closely with his counterpart in Justica, trying to keep dialog open between Governor Cristobal and the Workers' Council.

New Hope has the best bars in the colony: portside's Heinrich's Pub, which caters to pilots, Leviathan crews, and off-worlders, while Mackie B's serves farmers, miners, and most members of the Council. The Council also expanded the community center by cannibalizing a former army garrison and offers live concerts/talent shows every weekend.

## JUSTICA

This smaller settlement grew up from the original military base Brazil used to conduct weapons tests and training drills, one of the true purposes behind the colony's creation. The workers' uprising forced this collection of barracks, hangars, and administrative offices to accommodate Brazil's loyal citizens.

The town received its name during the period of isolation: meaning "justice" in Portuguese, the settlers claimed to be the true capital of the colony. While New Hope has the original spaceport, the military engineers began building landing pads that new supplies, materials, and personnel from the motherland helped finish after recontact. Today, Brazilian shipments can circumvent the customs rights that the Workers' Council claims.

The office and living quarters of Governor Josefa Cristobal are in the main administration building, from which she keeps in close contact with the entire chain of command of the Brazilian military. She keeps her officers on perpetual standby regarding the situation in New Hope, giving both her allies and foes the impression that a raid to finally end the rebels' usurpation could happen at any time.

While loyal to Brazil, the people of Justica remain divided on how to deal with New Hope and the Workers' Council. The years of forced cooperation left a good impression among many who wish to help resolve the conflict peacefully. However, Brazil has been forcing personnel rotation, and none of the new arrivals share the solidarity that the original settlers feel towards their neighbors.

Myrna Reséndiz is the leader of the main Æon Trinity mission. She was quick to designate a European as liaison with the Workers' Council while worked to gain the trust of the local Norça. Her relationship with Governor Cristobal is tense, but Reséndiz has not given up on a peaceful solution, and works around Averiguas' 23-hour clock drafting accords and agreements with input from both Justica's civilians and suggestions Edvardsson collects from New Hope.

While not under martial law, the people of Justica follow a strict military lifestyle, so it's not uncommon for personnel and off-duty soldiers to take the short travel to New Hope to enjoy the looser atmosphere, even if fights between rebels and loyalists are becoming more common.

## SITE NO. 24

The main Norça research compound is approximately 120 kilometers north from New Hope, built on the face of one of the mesas that dot the landscape. They have minor offices in both New Hope and Justica that serve mostly administrative roles, although the Justica building is a barracks for members taking part in combat exercises in the Brazilian army's facilities.

Site No. 24 has the most advanced security measures in Averiguas, and the order built underground and inside the mesa, keeping the details secret from the Brazilian government.

Martín Vargas leads the Norça's scientists and operatives; he warned the former governor about a potential rebellion due to the poor working conditions, coupled with Brazil's blatant failure to enforce fair labor laws. Since the isolation, Vargas has tried to remain neutral, and while his heart is with the Workers' Council's cause, his responsibility is to the Norça; he knows that antagonizing Brazil puts Norça's research at risk. Vargas already sent Proxy del Fuego an evacuation plan so that the order can move all its sensitive assets back to Earth, but the biokinetic proxy advised patience and perseverance.

The Norça research is kept under strict secrecy due to its nature: the biokinetics are researching Corruption and how it relates to the Aberrants' powers. While adhering to strict ethical and safety practices, the research is nonetheless dangerous and a powder keg of public relations that it has intentionally kept secret from the Æon Trinity and the other psi orders.

Some of the scientists believe their superiors fragment their work on purpose, so that they can only see a small part of a larger project known only to the Pai de Norça. They are not entirely wrong. Some of the research into quantum manipulation relates to quantakinesis rather than Corruption. Vargas trusts that his superiors in the order know what they are doing with the information, but he also knows they are not in Averiguas and may not be fully aware of how delicate the situation has become.

Bullseye is a post-apocalyptic world of shattered spires and forgotten dreams, of desolation and melancholia. Its name, given for the distinctive glassy craters that pockmark its surface, now seems darkly flippant considering the truth that the archaeologists of Tyrian Station have pried from its past. Each "bullseye" marks the graveyard of millions reduced to a thin smear of vitrified matter. While human researchers trawl through the wreckage in search of answers, an alien mind watches over the outpost's progress, vigilant for any sign that humanity might discover Bullseye's true history.

## TYRIAN STATION

The excitement of the first Upeo wa Macho surveyors at the incredible circular impact plains turned to horror and then puzzlement with the discovery of alien ruins, and the even stranger anomaly of the glass wastes' noetic interference. The order established a single outpost on a high vantage point near one of these glittering desolations three years after discovery and a skeleton crew of psions began to pick over the grave world's relics.

Now, that outpost serves as the hub of Tyrian Station, a haphazard agglomeration of warehouses, habitat modules, and laboratories sprung up around its sloping flanks. The last few months have seen new staff from Earth flood onto Bullseye, bringing the budding colony up to nearly a thousand personnel. Tyrian Station expanded according to necessity and practicality rather than an overarching plan, and the result is a confusing mess of structures. Most buildings are environmentally sealed and linked by covered passages, as glassy particulates and alien spores in the otherwise-breathable air make long-term exposure without a filter mask potentially hazardous. A simple perimeter uses sonic emitters and a non-lethal electric cordon to hold back local wildlife.

Although founded by Upeo wa Macho, the order now keeps only a single psion at Tyrian Station. Akina Mokoena was one of the first teleporters to set foot on Bullseye, and she resents having to surrender so much potential discovery to the crowding gang of bickering academics from Earth. Her colleagues have moved on for now, as the order's psions are in such demand following their return to the fold. Still, Akina holds a great deal of pull within the colony, and she does admit that the communal efforts of the expedition make greater headway into uncovering Bullseye's past.

The rest of the Tyrian community consists of research teams and support crews sponsored by a half-dozen institutions, governments, and private backers. Scientists from the UAN, FSA, the Andean Federation, and Italy keep the colony's labs and workshops a veritable hive of activity. The head of the expeditionary team, Doctor Caroline May, is an elderly archaeologist from the FSA. She's an acknowledged expert in her field and is well-meaning in her attempts to maintain harmony among the researchers, but she struggles with a growing sense of quiet dread instilled by Bullseye's post-apocalyptic landscape. To Doctor May, Bullseye seems more and more like a stark warning, a mass grave that she feels like she is violating through her efforts.

Back on Earth, media touts Tyrian Station as the big success story of xenoarchaeological opportunity and co-operation. However, the community's atmosphere is tense, and not just from academic competitiveness and jostling over the station's limited resources. Sponsors back home are keen for "their" people to get credit on the next big find, at the expense of others if necessary, and some of the researchers are hangers-on or second-raters who pulled on influence rather than expertise to snag a place in this choice assignment. Accidents and a few deaths have plagued the expedition, leading to rumors and even outright accusations of sabotage.

Most Tyrian personnel are neutrals, but the outpost houses a handful of psions other than Akina and the occasional teleporter bringing supplies or rotating staff out. A pair of vitakinetics from the Æsculapian Order provide medical support and study the interactions between human and Bullseye biologies. The remainder are ISRA clairsentients. They originally intended to use their psionic abilities to sift through the planet's past in search of answers, but the bizarre noetic veil that shrouds so much of Bullseye's history in static presents a major obstacle.

The team leader for the Andean Federation delegation, Doctor Maeteo Sanhueza, is a rogue telepath. His abilities do not appear in any of the expedition's files, and even if anyone did suspect him of harboring telepathic powers, they wouldn't guess his real secret. A monstrously powerful alien presence — one

## CLAIRVOYANT INTERFERENCE

Any attempts to use Clairsentience to dig into Bullseye's past suffer extreme interference in the form of a level 5 Complication. Failure to buy off this Complication reduces information to a garbled haze. Even buying the Complication off provides only partial, incomplete information requiring extensive analysis to be of use.

The Doyen observer watches Clairsentience use carefully. When a psion manages to draw forth some useful information, it engineers contact between Sanhueza and the psion in question to bring its colossal telepathic powers to bear, and then edits the victim's memories of what they discovered. It uses as light a touch as it can to delete crucial knowledge and reinforce the idea Bullseye's history is beyond psionic reach.

For now, the Doyen can pull the strings of its puppets with little concern of discovery, but the arrival of a skilled telepath who can recognize the signs of such mental meddling will hamper its efforts significantly and force it to act.

of the Doyen who personally engineered Bullseye's genocide — has possessed Doctor Sanhueza.

### THE OBSERVER

The post-physical Doyen murdered Bullseye from fear of the natives' quantum powers. Now, they observe with some concern as humans make footfall on the scene of a two-hundred-thousand-year-old crime.

The Doyen possessing Doctor Sanhueza personally instigated the annihilation of the Bullseye entities. It monitors for signs that the researchers might discover the truth of Doyen involvement. It arranges "accidents" to cull troublesome individuals via supposed malfunctions of heavy machinery or direct telepathic influence. It's also the real reason for the trouble the clairsentient psions have in viewing Bullseye's past.

Via the unwitting help of Sanhueza's Andean Federation colleagues, the Doyen has rediscovered a cruel relic of Bullseye's past. Using data from the expedition's scans, it has found an ancient cache of alien munitions buried nearby Tyrian Station. The bombs are still functional enough for the observer to sow them as further hazards for the archaeologists.

The situation is not entirely under the Doyen's control. Noetic static kicked up by the nearby glass plain's sandstorms disrupts the Doyen's influence over Sanhueza. Whenever a storm rages, it shunts its vessel into unconsciousness and clings onto his mind with the desperate hope it won't lose its grip. Some of his colleagues have begun noticing that Doctor Sanhueza's crippling migraines coincide with these weather events.

Maeteo is a prisoner in his own mind. He's locked in, aware but unable to control his own actions as the Doyen drives him around like a puppet. Even if he manages to escape possession, he has little understanding of what's been going on beyond the presence of a malevolent alien force in his brain. He has a few precious seconds when waking after a sandstorm in which he is blessedly free, but thus far has been too groggy and confused to take advantage of this window of opportunity.

## AN ECHO OF A WORLD

Bullseye is a post-apocalyptic world. The planet has not recovered from the cataclysm visited upon its surface two hundred thousand years ago, and the colonists can't escape the sense of fragility pervading their surroundings.

Sunlight on Bullseye is wan and almost pastel-pale even at its strongest, lending the landscape a dreamlike quality. Wind whips up from still silence at a scant moment's notice, but the thin air leaves the weather lackluster, all sound and fury, rattling the shells of habitat modules and brushing through the fields of purple grass in great, rippling waves, but lacking real force. Rainfall from the opalescent clouds comes as a gentle sprinkle, enough to slake the land's thirst but lacking any vigor. Combined with the difficulty the clairvoyants have in reading the past of this ruined place, some of the researchers can't help but feel they're dwelling in a fading memory of a world, somewhere not quite real.

Lavender and violet plants paint the Bullseye steppes in shades of vegetation. Few indigenous plants are poisonous, but equally few are edible for humans, and several produce spores or particulates

that irritate the human respiratory system. Biological analysis reveals several of the vegetative strains bear the hallmarks of genetic engineering, likely cultivated strains that have run wild since the extinguishing of their creators.

Protocols mandate that at least one armed security officer accompanies any expeditionary group. Most local wildlife leaves human interlopers alone, frightened by such alien creatures, but a few of the larger predators pose a potential threat. Due to the eight-limbed template of most local animal life, the running joke among colonists is that "everything is spiders," though few follow a shape that's actually anything like a terrestrial arachnid.

One species of solitary hunter has caused problems for the archaeologists. Nicknamed "housekeepers," these aggressive predators have adapted to the hollowed-out ruins of the dead cities. The eight-limbed beasts have a pair of hypertrophied forelimbs evolved to crack the thick carapace of their armored prey, and lurk inside darkened buildings to snatch animals passing within reach. The housekeepers have accounted for several serious injuries so far, and security officers now check structures for the telltale gouges and scratches around an entrance that indicate one of these hunters dwells within.

## BULLSEYE ENTITIES

Although the natives of Bullseye are long gone, the marks of their passing linger. Putting together the pieces of their story is a challenging task as two hundred millennia have obliterated a great deal of evidence, but the researchers have recovered enough remains and damaged relics to achieve some understanding of this lost people.

Bones and corpses mummified by the ruined environment show the creatures' four forearms terminated in nimble digits, while their tapering heads sported a series of beak-like bone ridges. Analysis suggests the entities were omnivorous but likely evolved from the same branch as the pack predators who roam Bullseye's plains today. Cranial matter indicates their brain structure was radically different from closely related species. The researchers haven't yet made the leap from this evidence, but the entities' quantum abilities evolved over time rather than erupting in the way that human novas did.

Culturally, the Bullseye entities were a disunited people in a globalized world. Relics and artifacts show a wide range of artistic styles, while the few scraps of understanding gleaned from recorded data show rival city-states and powerful societal units that were a hybrid of industrial cartel and cult. After a string of ecological disasters, the entities achieved some level of balance with their environment and began to fully harness the world's forces, tapping into renewable energy sources and exploiting the seas as well as the land. Their technological prowess was slightly behind that of modern humanity when doom came to Bullseye, though a precious few technological finds show strange capabilities that aren't easily explicable.

## GRUBS

A puzzling anomaly in the archaeological record, the armored corpses of Grubs litter some of the ruined cities. Nicknamed for their caterpillar-like appearance, their only known remains consist of the tattered remains of ancient sealed environment suits: the Grubs' soft tissues have long since vanished. Tyrian staff posit they may be a client species, but reconstructions of their suits reveals that there appears to be no link between the Grubs and any surviving life forms on the planet.

Although they understand that they may fail, the Doyen observer hopes to keep secret the fact that the Grubs are alien to Bullseye, just like the human researchers who now pry at their remains. These ferocious combatants came to the planet to wage war against the Bullseye entities, driven by the commands and influence of the Doyen. Wielding considerably more advanced technology than the natives, the Grubs rampaged through the surviving major cities and butchered the vast bulk of the remaining population. Their armaments still litter these ruined settlements, and several weapons dumps remain hidden in secure bunkers — including the one recently discovered by the Doyen observer. The irony is that Grub relics usually emerge from the excavations in better condition than those of the Bullseye entities themselves, in large part because Grubs, by necessity, built their technologies from far more durable materials.

Grubs were boneless creatures supported by hydrostatic skeletons. They came from an exceptionally alien world with a fluorine atmosphere and gravity four times that of Earth. They were immensely strong, almost tireless, and their tissues consisted of a sort of living fluorocarbon plastic that is exceptionally resilient. As their suits decayed, all traces of their native atmosphere leaked out more than 100,000 years ago. However, a few fragments of their alien

flesh remain, fragments that archeologists currently believe are plastic parts from the inside of their suits. The psionic interference on Bullseye is too great for clears to gain more than the most fragmentary images, but as soon as someone manages to ship a Grub's suit, and perhaps fragments of its flesh to Earth, powerful clairsentients should be able to learn that the Grubs were fluorine-breathing aliens.

Visually, Grubs looked vaguely like five-meter-long caterpillars with a nest of long writhing tentacles located just below their heads. They had three enormous eyes, and despite their rudimentary legs, their vast strength and the exceptionally fast metabolism provided by their fluorine-based biology allowed them to run at speeds in excess of 40 kph. They equipped their armored environment suits with built-in blades and lasers, allowing them to be formidable foes even when otherwise disarmed.

## UNEARTHING THE EVIDENCE

Long, straight tracks cut through the lavender plains between Tyrian Station and its connected dig sites, forged by the regular traffic of light vehicles bearing personnel and findings. Each site is an outpost with a generator, habitation modules, and lab, allowing work and investigation to continue unabated. All told, half a dozen such outposts litter the local region, mostly within a day's drive of the hub.

Despite internal friction, limited resources, and the meddling of the Doyen observer, archaeologists are busy scraping back the scar tissue of Bullseye's post-apocalyptic past. Effort primarily focuses on city ruins, both pre- and post-disaster. Natural forces have taken their toll on the cones and pyramids that the Bullseye entities favored, but the aliens used hardy materials that have left behind empty ghost-towns of hollow-eyed structures. Thousands of years of dirt bury the lower levels of these ancient buildings, necessitating heavy machinery to clear and explore subterranean spaces. It's in these underground levels the researchers have had most luck; above ground, wind and water have cleaned out the leaning spires and left little behind.

Findings are plentiful but almost universally in terrible condition. Bones, broken wreckage ruined beyond comprehension, and crushed goods pour forth from the dig sites. The signs of strife are disturbingly clear in the pre-disaster cities — discarded ammunition casings, the corroded lumps of high-velocity metal slugs, and structural elements warped by intense energy exposure of unknown nature. Normally, clairvoyant psychometry would offer answers but an underlying haze of noetic static plays havoc with attempts to view the past. The most powerful ISRA delegate on Bullseye, Frederuico Biancardi, believes the planetwide disaster involved quantum energy directly distorting the space-time continuum, quite possibly to mask what happened here from later visitors. He claims it might be possible to part the veil with the aid of a quantakinetic psion, an obvious pipedream after the Chitra Bhanu purge.

The city ruins can be dangerous. Ancient cone-towers lean against one another in wild thickets of architectural disarray, or are only supported by the strata of earth piled around their flanks. A misjudged excavation can, and has, brought buildings down with fatal effect. Housekeeper attacks are frequent. A local plant nicknamed the "glitterbomb" has entered its biennial sporing phase, coughing out thick clouds of glittering particles with the same effect on sensitive human membranes as tear gas.

### BROKEN GLASS

Although an early focus of attention, the huge glass plains that made Bullseye famous no longer see archaeological attention. These bleakly beautiful expanses of shattered glass and pearlescent sand show dips and ridges where once great cities and advanced infrastructure sat, but the cataclysm that laid waste to them reduced everything to a smear of chemistry. Nothing survives for recovery.

When the wind whips up, it pulls sand into whirling, glimmering columns that bring disruptive noetic static. The storms play havoc with psionic powers and swiftly clog equipment, but lack the force to harm anyone caught within them, if they keep their filter masks on— one researcher died when she forgot to check the seals on her mask before venturing out to perform noetic tests during a sandstorm. However, the strange properties of the glass caught the attention of the colony's backers at home. Rather than excavation, effort turns to exploitation. The nearest outpost is essentially a mining operation now, gathering up glass and sand to send back to Earth.

### EBBING WATER

Bullseye's seas once covered far more of its surface. The growing ice caps trapped much of this water, the many asteroid impacts may have thrown some into

## GLASS STORMS

The whirling storms of sand and glass temporarily disrupt noetic powers across the plain where they occur. Anyone attempting to use a psionic power within one mile of a glass storm's outer edge must buy off a level 3 Complication to avoid the power going awry, usually in the form of affecting the wrong target or area.

space, and a portion of the lost seas are simply unaccounted for. The exposed seabeds of coastal areas have transformed into a new habitat, with life forms adapted to the high-salinity but rich silt. It's a lush landscape by Bullseye's standards, a liminal zone of blue and purple vegetation transformed into saltwater marsh for a few brief weeks each year.

Surveys detected lingering ruins and deformations on the former seabed, evidence the Bullseye natives once built submarine infrastructure. In the last few weeks, excitement has rippled through Tyrian Station at the discovery of anomalous signals in deeper water. These seem to be emissions from a major native installation beneath the waves, somehow still functioning.

Much of the ruin has collapsed or flooded, but its central structure is still intact and draws power from geothermal vents. Crippled systems transmit feeble signals, looking for a network that has long since vanished. The underwater outpost is a potential treasure trove: a small community of entities clung on in its sunken halls for several centuries before falling to despair and madness, and any researchers who breach the place will find relics and wreckage in strange arrangements speaking of tormented minds. Unfortunately, the installation's defensive systems are also still active, albeit woefully run down, and overseen by the ancient, demented equivalent of an SI. Large aquatic predators writhe through the waters around the installation, feeding on the rich abundance of prey that thrives around the geothermal vents.

### THE LEVIATHAN'S WAKE

A Leviathan drop ship will soon arrive in system, carrying tons of equipment and drones along with hundreds of new personnel. A terrorist cell has infiltrated the ranks of the passengers and intends to sabotage the vessel, causing catastrophic damage when it jumps. These saboteurs belong to the Quiet Path, an extremist philosophical sect who see the destruction of Bullseye as a dire warning that the galaxy is full of terrors that could snuff humanity out in an instant. Bullseye's mass graves are both sacred and profane; tampering with them risks drawing the attention of whatever horrors lurk in the outer dark.

If the terrorists manage to carry off their plot, Tyrian Station will wake to a false dawn as the drop shop detonates in orbit. Even if foiled, more sect members wait as sleeper agents among the new personnel, hoping to reach planetfall, sabotage the blasphemous excavations of the dead world, and help rein in humanity's thirst for space exploration. They will become perfect pawns for the Doyen observer.

# EDEN

Among the biggest surprises the Upeo found in their explorations was a colony world created and ruled by sane Aberrants. Eden was a secret so sensitive that it drove a wedge between the teleporters and the rest of the orders, and was an indirect cause for the Upeo disappearance.

Everyone who lived through this era knew stories of nova-age extrasolar colonies, but many of the specifics vanished during the Crash. Records recovered from that era mention groups like the Space Brigade, who occupied Luna by the end of the Aberrant War, or the Daedalus League, whose exploits remain shrouded in misinformation and media hype. The Upeo knew they might eventually stumble upon such a colony, but nothing prepared them to find one that was not only functional, but also thriving and, moreover, happy.

The people of Eden live under Aberrant rule, who prefer the archaic term nova to refer to their rulers, treating them like celebrities, monarchs, and deities. In turn, the very stable and benevolent Aberrants protect their subjects, maintain their cities, and otherwise make sure that life in the planet is safe, prosperous, and fulfilling.

Despite this apparently semi-feudal way of life, Eden is a sophisticated world with advanced technology, a constitution, its own government agencies, and its own space exploration programs. The general public in the Sol system know little to nothing about Eden while the Æon Trinity and the United Nations work to make sense of it, but Edenites — Aberrant and neutrals alike — are eager to reestablish contact with their homeworld and rejoin a humanity that may not be ready to accept sane Aberrants, much less Aberrants ruling over humans.

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The ruling novas made sure their people would be safe and comfortable, and their choice of planet shows this. The conditions of Eden make it look like a pristine Earth, with landscapes in various shades of green, blue skies, full weather patterns, and colorful fauna. The light from the central and outlying cities are visible from space, surrounded by vast expanses of darkness, driving home that while the colony boasts over a million people plus the nearly 60 novas who protect them, the planet still belongs to its original inhabitants.

The most distinctive feature of Eden is its ecology. On first look, Eden has different species of both animals and plants, but they are all part of the same mega-being. Eden only has 11 organisms covering both its land and sea surfaces. These beings, called "myriasoma" are the collective of all the "animals" and "plants" within a particular territory. It's easy to tell myriasomas apart as they collectively resemble a full ecosystem and its stabile (the plant-like beings) and mobile (the animal-like creatures) members have shared physical traits.

Members of the same myriasoma live in a symbiotic network, acting much like the cells of a complex organism. Communication between members is chemical, either airborne through spores and pheromones, or through interconnected roots or the uncanny property of some mobiles to "plug" into a stabile.

As a single organism, members of the same myriasoma do not attack each other but fulfill different roles to ensure the myriasoma's survival. However, the myriasoma consider anything not chemically marked as an "ally" as a resource they can freely harvest and eat. The competing ecosystems mark their own members, and recognize the markers for the other myriasomas, treating such markers as hostile.

Had humans landed on Eden on their own, they would have fallen prey to the myriasoma early in the colony's history. However, the novas make sure the colony is safe from the creatures' depredations, either with their own superhuman powers, or by helping develop technology to prevent incursions of myriasoma elements, drive them back when it happens, and negate the various biological strategies the myriasoma develop to deal with the foreign presence.

Eden's settlements occupy a territory that intersects with three myriasoma, who received the names of Saltu, Campus, and Mare Parvus.

### SALTU

This myriasoma is a thick jungle bordering the township of Venture in the northwest of Eden's colonized area. Venture's outer perimeter consists of posts that emit quantum pulses that interfere with the chemical communication of the myriasoma, followed by high walls as the inner perimeter, scoured

clean periodically from any weed or fungus that tries to infest the wall surface.

Saltu has an extremely rich variety of stabile subspecies, and harvesting parties protected by novas regularly venture to gather some of the fruit-like growths for analysis, but never consumption, as Saltu often grows toxic fruits as part of its measures to combat the colonists' foreign presence, as well as to establish footholds into Campus' territory.

Saltu mobiles tend towards the insect-like, able to climb and navigate the thickly arranged stabiles. Brachiation is a common feature among these subspecies, but burrowing is also possible, allowing Saltu to grow downward in cavern systems seeping with ground water.

## CAMPUS

To the east, Campus spreads as a vast grassland. Many farms replaced Campus stabiles with Earth vegetation, modified by the novas to be able to both grow in Eden and remain edible or useful to humans. Novas spliced Campus' biomarkers into many of these modified Earth species, and while this has prevented stabiles from trying to encroach on the farmlands, the mobiles do not recognize them and still treat them as unclaimed resources to steal.

Campus is less aggressive than Saltu, allowing Edenites to build farms some distance away from Harmony. These farms require only basic security like magnetic field barriers and the quantum marker scramblers to remain safe.

All the blades of grass outside the human farms are Campus stabiles that are part of the same, incredibly vast root system. This allows the myriasoma to react quickly to any incursion from Saltu or to lost humans who wander away from the safety of their enclaves without chemical protection.

Most of the Campus mobiles resemble swift herd animals like deer, with warriors growing no larger than an Earth wolf. However, Campus prefers flying mobiles of many sizes, with the smallest fitting snugly in a grown human's palms, and the largest reaching a wingspan of up to 10 meters. The nova calling themself Shepherd determined the flying mobiles are either scouts and sentries, or carriers who take biomass to other parts of the myriasoma.

## ÆON TRINITY AND PROJECT UTOPIA

Eden novas have clear memories of Project Utopia, the international organization that oversaw everything dealing with novas, their powers, and how to use them for the benefit of humanity. They also remember that the Æon Society heavily sponsored Project Utopia, and some may treat Æon Trinity personnel as a continuation of Utopia and its ideals. **Trinity Continuum: Aberrant** describes the ins and outs of both organizations, and Eden's archives of old Earth knowledge contains detailed information about both the Æon Society and Project Utopia.

### MARE PARVUS

The roads leading south from Harmony reach the coasts of a large body of water surrounded on both sides by the lands of both Saltu and Campus. The myriasoma of this inland sea is in constant conflict with Mare Amplus, an oceanic myriasoma who would overwhelm Parvus if not for the protection of the landmass that only leaves a canal roughly five kilometers wide connecting the two seas.

Nonetheless, Mare Parvus is a complete maritime ecosystem, and Edenites fish the mobiles, which are edible. The nova Nereid claims stewardship of Mare Parvus and makes certain that the coastal waters are safe for both transportation and recreation.

The town of Prosperity is directly south of Harmony and built on the coast of Mare Parvus. Its people combine fishing with botany as they harvest some of the rare myriasoma elements who begin their life cycle as stabiles, but can later uproot from the sea floor to become mobiles.

### OTHER MYRIASOMA

The planet has eight more myriasoma spread evenly throughout both land and sea. The novas keep an eye on them as a matter of general interest, with an eye on the future growth of the colony into their territories.

## PRESERVED PAST

Having fled Earth long before the end of the Aberrant War, Edenites took with them knowledge and technology that Earth lost during the Aberrant War. The Æon Trinity is particularly interested in filling the blanks in many records of the Nova Age.

One of the reasons behind the quarantine placed on Eden and its people is their technology. While bearing some resemblance to Earth hardtech, the people of Eden have tools and devices designed by their nova protectors, some of which defy the understanding of neutrals and psions alike.

Eden tech is extremely energy-efficient, using rechargeable power cells to provide energy to devices, vehicles, and even houses. Clean hyperfusion reactors provide power to recharge the cells to complement the nova Apollo's services, but farms use a combination of reactor and solar power. Design follows elegant, slightly curved lines and Edenites make many devices from a plastic polymer that breaks down and decomposes in minutes when exposed to isopropyl alcohol.

Personal computers are portable but not wearable and are just improvements on 21st century tablets and smartphones. Edenites eschewed augmented reality in favor of high-definition holographic overlays, and use them in moderation to avoid visual contamination of their surroundings.

Medical knowledge is on par with Earth's, but treatments diverge along parallel developments, and the same goes for other biological sciences, where Eden scientists harness the wealth of diversity from the myriasoma to develop medicine, seed hybrids, biomarker sprays (so that a myriasoma identifies the wearer as part of itself), and food processing methods.

Eden's novas drive progress and experimentation, but not to the point that the Edenites are completely dependent on the novas' powers. The superhuman rulers of the planet want their followers to participate in the growth of their shared home, not to be simple recipients of the novas' boons.

## TWO SETS OF RULES

Eden society is egalitarian, making no distinction between genders, ethnicities, nationalities, or any other classification. Except for the most glaring and obvious: there are novas, and there are neutrals, and different sets of rules govern the two groups.

More than laws, novas follow an unwritten code of ethics that includes general adherence to Eden's constitution. An Edenite nova has the power to suspend

any law with the agreement of two of their peers, while the neutral population needs council hearings and a majority vote. One of the driving philosophies underlying the legal privileges that novas enjoy is that, for Edenites, novas simply know better.

While novas encourage each other to build rapport with their followers, it's up to each nova to decide how they accomplish this, or if they do it at all. Apollo, the nova with whom the Upeo and Æon interact more frequently, is famous for his daily strolls around all the settlements, tasting the food from vendors, complimenting artisans on their work, and generally establishing himself as a pillar of the community. Gardener, on the other end of the social spectrum, shuns contact even with their peers, preferring to study the local wildlife and experimenting with new strains that can be of use to the colony.

However, all novas' interactions with neutrals are and always will be, one-sided. The neutral population treats novas with a deference that borders on worship. They are acutely aware of the difference in sheer power and behave accordingly.

The material needs of both neutrals and novas are easy to meet thanks to both their advanced technology and the scope of nova powers. This led to a post-capitalist society where barter is the local currency, and it mostly pays for services rather than goods, or for service providers to acquire goods. Favors are also an unofficial form of currency, running on good faith. In cases were individuals abuse their promises or scam others with a barter, people can call upon the judgment of Arbiter, a nova with the power to peer into a person's past to confirm wrongdoing.

Novas are exempt from this trading system; they can take whatever they want or ask for the services of anyone in the colony, and the neutrals are happy to accommodate them and even consider it the highest of praise for their work.

The novas' self-enforced ethics temper this neo-feudal relationship. All novas accept that none of them should abuse their dominion over neutrals. In the colony's history, there have been two cases where a nova exploited their subjects. One of them was just a lazy nova who had neutrals working for him for every need. The other novas chastised him and made him help with various tasks around Eden. Apollo and his fellows discovered that the other nova was nurturing his own cult, complete with slavery and sexual abuse. The novas captured him, tried him, and warped him to the center of Valerion, Eden's sun.

## DISCOVERY

The Upeo wa Macho first found Eden when stumbling on a space mining expedition. The Edenites were confused but then ecstatic that Earth had not only survived the Aberrant War, but now was reaching out into space with a new breed of Gifted. When the nova Horizon warped to their location to collect them, she was wary of the teleporters at first, but then extended an invitation to Eden, where Apollo received the Upeo with open arms.

The novas never lied to the Edenites about the past and didn't hide the news of recontact either, so by the time the Upeo had finished their welcoming chat with Apollo, the entire colony was already celebrating and threw a festival in the teleporters' honor.

Further contact missions followed as Bolade Atwan assessed the situation and whether they should trust these sane Aberrants or not. The Upeo got to know the Edenites and their nova rulers, but were more reserved in what they shared about Earth and its colonies. The Edenites understood, although the nova Pioneer convinced Atwan to let him tag along on some of the teleporters' explorations and patrols, which is how Eden found out about the status of Karroo Station, and were ready to launch a defense force when the Chromatics attacked it.

Finally, in 2122, Atwan informed Apollo that Earth's authorities knew about Eden now, and the novas repeated their invitation for anyone from Earth to visit, but left the details open for their potential guests to define. Soon enough, a diplomatic mission under Æon authority arrived, and the novas and neutrals of Eden are doing their best to convince their long-lost brethren that they are friends.

As reported in detail to Æon as well as UN authorities and the psi order proxies, Edenites treat the people from Earth like lost family, and treat psions with the same mix of respect and deference as they treat their novas.

## HARMONY

The capital city of Eden, Harmony is small compared to Earth arcologies, but is just as advanced, even more so in certain areas like power and infrastructure. Every cable, conduit, and pipe runs underground, keeping the skyline clean. Power comes from a generator that feeds small, local grids. The view is clear skies all around except to the north, where Mount Diligence rises to an altitude of around 3,000 feet. The novas raised the mountain upon first arrival

in order to claim the area from the myriasoma.

Public transportation is discrete and efficient, with small automated trolleys following set routes. Private vehicles are few and used sparsely, as people prefer to walk if their destination is not too far. The atmosphere in the city is relaxed, and nobody rushes to work, with schedules being flexible but adhered to thanks to a culture of communal responsibility.

Harmony's layout seems slightly haphazard but follows the building philosophies behind arcologies: build complete mini-communities that mesh together so that people create strong bonds with their neighbors but can also easily visit other districts. As such, Harmony consists of five boroughs that are almost self-sufficient, but they each have something to offer to the others.

A magrail system connects Harmony with its satellite communities: Prosperity, Venture, and Ingenuity. The trains are small, like the urban trolleys, but their speed and frequency exceed the needs of Eden's people.

The Plaza is the city's main square, built in a pentagonal shape with slightly curved sides. City Hall, the tallest building in Eden, takes up the entire side that rests against Mount Diligence. Its 12 stories and five basements are the center of all of Eden's colonial government: parliamentary auditoriums, courts of law, and administrative offices share space with the audience rooms were novas discuss government, law, and other affairs with the neutral officials.

City Hall has two elevators leading to the top of Mount Diligence, where Skyward District holds the private homes of the novas. While anyone is welcome to visit, neutrals regard Skyward almost religiously. Government representatives are the only neutrals who regularly visit Skyward. Novas rarely use the elevators to Skyward and either fly, warp, or use other superhuman modes of travel to reach their homes.

The market takes up the Plaza's entire southeastern corner. Here, farmers, craftspeople, and traders of all kind ply their wares. The market sets up every weekend, and the square lights up and offers entertainment and food to buyers and stall owners alike. There are hotels and restaurants along the south and southeastern sides of the Plaza, which is where offworlders currently stay.

A modest spaceport lies at the southeastern border of the city, where shuttles take passengers to the other towns, to deploy them in scientific and exploration expeditions, and to connect with the orbital Threshold Station.

## PROSPERITY

On the shores of Mare Parvus, Prosperity has all the forms and functions of a fishing town, but also hosts a biological research laboratory that cooperates with the fishers to keep track of the myriasoma's evolution. Eden's hydroponic farms welcome Earth's scientific liaisons who wish to study how their technology differs from Earth's.

Popular holovids and stories tell of "sea monster attacks" on Prosperity, which were common occurrence in the early days of the town, but have grown uncommon after the development of the chemical and electromagnetic defenses Edenites use around their settlements. Prosperity is also the home of the nova Nereid, who leaves for days or weeks at a time to explore both Mare Parvus and the other maritime myriasomas.

## VENTURE

Bordering Saltu, Venture is Eden's industrial center. Venture's hardtech factories employ large 3D printers beyond the volume capacity of any Earth equivalent, which allows them to create large parts and complete structures. Novas transport the largest objects to their destination. Six factories take turns producing parts for the three assembly workshops and devoting their printers to experimental materials research.

The nova Tvashtri oversees operations in Venture and it is not strange to find him, — or one of his solid energy duplicates, working alongside his neutral laborers, engineers, and designers.

Venture has the strongest defenses in Eden due to Saltu's aggressiveness, but designers tastefully concealed the plasma cannons, monofilament net casters, and sonic barriers in the architecture, where they wait until residents use them to respond to an attack by Saltu's mobiles.

## INGENUITY

Eden's newest town lies to the east of Harmony. Its purpose is to provide neutral scientists with general laboratories and workshops where they can work on projects not related to manufacture, like Venture, or biology, like Prosperity. As part of a decentralization strategy, Ingenuity now houses Eden's first university Apollo University, which moved there from City Hall. This institution has both neutral and nova teachers.

Since recontact with Earth, Ingenuity is also expanding to host an embassy built in cooperation with Æon, who will be the first tenant. Contact with psions also prompted Edenites to open noetic research as a new discipline, and are more than eager to learn from Earth's specialists.

## THRESHOLD STATION

Not a town in the strict sense of the word, Threshold is a settlement in orbit around Eden. Spacefaring novas brought an asteroid, and set it on a stable orbit. On it, they built a small outpost that coordinates Eden's small satellite network as the shipyards, drydocks, hangars, and headquarters of the Edenite space fleet. This fleet consists of one medium cargo ship, five deep space vessels for mining missions, and two dozen shuttles that ferry the ships' crew and workers, as well as the station's personnel, between the artificial satellite and the planet's surface. New construction is underway to provide safe and proper docking for Earth's Leviathans.

## THE UNASSUMING PANTHEON

Eden is the home of nearly 60 Aberrants who exhibit none of the traits people from Earth normally associate with their kind. Respectful, civilized, in full control of their quantum powers and social privileges. Æon personnel have not yet interviewed all Eden novas, but have compiled a list with observations and comments for analysis about those who have reached out or not minded their approaches.

**Apollo:** Tall, highly charismatic, with a golden cast to his skin, and an unearthly glow, Apollo is the self-appointed representative of Eden before Earth. Atwan's initial impression of him is that of an idealistic adventurer, quick to jump to the defense of people he has never met and who view him as a monster of legend. Apollo led the defense of Karroo, and gently nudges Æon and UN representatives to give him and his people the chance to deploy to Khantze Lu Ge to help them solve their Aberrant infestation.

**Nereid:** The least human-looking of the novas, she looks like a humanoid sea creature, covered in scales and fins, with tentacles growing from her head instead of hair, and a mouth slightly wider than normal. Still, she has a certain mesmerizing quality and a voice that rivals in beauty with Diva's.

**Shepherd:** One of Eden's leading experts on myriasoma, Shepherd is also an exemplar of human fitness: fast, strong, agile, and resilient, with extraordinary senses and an uncanny ability to track anything and anyone.

**Gardener:** A gifted biochemist who can take living matter into her body for analysis and transformation. She adapted all specimens in the colony's seed vault to thrive on Eden soil and can mimic the biomarkers of all myriasoma, as well as synthesize them to help neutrals camouflage themselves from mobiles and stabiles.

**Diva:** A consummate entertainer, Diva is a soap opera star, hit singer, media darling, patron of the arts, and sometimes spiritual counselor since she remains a devout Catholic. She leads all cultural activities in Eden in one way or another, and her social life provides both inspiration and entertainment.

**Tvashtri:** The head engineer of Venture is a gruff non-binary person whose control over energy is near Apollo's level, but they use it to create solid energy constructs that serve as models and templates for Venture's engineers.

**Arbiter:** This is not a particular nova but a title that novas take turns assuming to hold court and solve disputes between neutrals. There are always three Arbiters who don masks and loose robes to hide their actual identity. Once a nova assumes the role of Arbiter, they can link with their two other peers to create the gestalt being of High Arbiter, who only forms to hold judgment over other novas.

**Pioneer:** One of Eden's warp-capable novas, Pioneer loves to explore and often leaves Eden for months. He sees Earth Leviathan operators with utmost respect, and wants to learn how to join in the psionic synergy between clear, telepath, and teleporter in order to improve his own forays into deep space.

**Horizon:** An overprotective spacefarer, Horizon is not as adventurous as Pioneer, but rather keeps an eye on any possible threat from space. Her overbearing personality almost caused first contact with teleporters to go awry, but once dialog prevailed, she put Earth back under her protective wing and is one of the novas must eager to rejoin humanity's defense.

# FAR NYUMBA

Far Nyumba is a gentle world, warm and humid to be sure but immanently habitable. For all that, though, its hardships during the six-year loss of contact proved the colony's not quite ready to stand on its own, and while becoming fully self-sufficient is now a high priority it's still years in the future. Discoveries made on Mgitu are drawing researchers by the hundreds, more every year, and the locals in Jifunza often get on well with them. However, the UAN's open-emigration policies have also drawn colonists from other walks of life, including some determined to start autonomist societies. Time will tell whether Far Nyumba's culture can survive these changes.

## THE WAY THINGS WERE

A garden world sheltered by its massive brother, Far Nyumba was an exceptionally lucky find even by clairsentient standards — an Earthlike world, free from pathogens, parasites, or predators that might threaten a nascent colony. Humans moved in quickly, with the UAN formally establishing a colony at Far Nyumba less than a year later. Jifunza began as a series of prefabricated structures, but quickly grew beyond such humble beginnings. Within three years, tens of thousands were living full-time on Far Nyumba, and there was a constant back-and-forth of scientists studying both the moon and the world it orbited, which hosted its own complex ecosystem. Just before the Upeo abandoned Earth, uncrewed probes sent to Mgitu discovered technological artifacts floating in its dense atmosphere. Unknown aliens that researchers named Zeps built these artifacts (see **Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 105).

In the interval, things were hard for Far Nyumba. There had been no serious provision for self-sufficiency or local crop growth, only a few small experiments centered on adapting terrestrial staples to Far Nyumba's environment. Once it was clear recontact would not be coming any time soon, colonial officials and agricultural scientists came together to run the numbers, and worked out a system where, they believed, they could ration prepackaged food stores

to ensure survival for long enough to turn a few laboratory specimens of rice, sorghum, soybeans, and sweet potatoes into sufficient crops to achieve self-sufficiency. With a little luck, they said, Far Nyumba could hold out until relief arrived.

Perhaps they did have luck, even good luck, considering the events of the next six years. A locust analogue species hatched and swarmed in 2117, and the crops were nearly lost — as it was, the bodies of expired locusts, their energies spent on mating, clogged infrastructure, and attracted vermin for almost six months thereafter. Later that year, and stretching into 2118, the summer grew hot enough that it stunted the soybean crop, leading the colony to move to quarter-rations until the other crops could take up the slack. That stretched through the autumn and winter, when an Upeo team arrived with emergency rations. Unfortunately, they also brought influenza with them, and it swept through the population of Jifunza for weeks afterward, leaving the colony virtually paralyzed for months.

The combination of famine and flu was the single highest-mortality event during Far Nyumba's isolation, but it was not the only one. Over 150 people died during those six years, some from a lack of medication only available on Earth, others from misfortune. Six took their own lives despite the community's best efforts to guard against depression and despair. A memorial plinth stands in Jifunza Square, inscribed with the names of the fallen, and every year practically the entire community — and all the survivors who still live on Far Nyumba — turn out for a remembrance ceremony on the anniversary of the jump ship Tiamat arriving in-system, when the colony's isolation ended.

## THE WAY THINGS ARE

Far Nyumba has been back in contact with Earth for a little over a year, and there is still a palpable sense of relief as food, medicine, and materiel flow to a colony much in need. Many survivors of the isolation have returned to Earth, but even there they maintain contact not only with each other but with their fellows of old on Far Nyumba. The Old-Timers, as some think of themselves, are an eclectic lot, independent but not insular, bound together by hard experience and the struggle to survive over 10,000 light years from their home.

Two major sources of tension are building beneath the surface. The more obvious of the two being the rapid influx of new colonists following recontact. Nearly a quarter of Nyumbans are now post-recontact arrivals, with more pouring in practically by the day, not all of whom fit in with the prevailing culture of Far Nyumba. A significant minority are isolationist groups who successfully petitioned the UAN for colonial licenses to establish their own settlements on Far Nyumba, settlements which run counter to the extant local mindset.

The autotrophic Perezistas live in Balance, some 230 kilometers from Jifunza, where they've built a settlement constructed of organically grown structures. These buildings symbiotically interact with the inhabitants' altered biochemistries, enhancing their ability to subsist without the consumption of other living beings, even plants — which they consider to be a backward practice. Their settlement is only accessible via air, by sea, or on foot, as they refuse to permit the construction of any roads in their ceded territory, nor do they permit any sort of hardtech, which they believe is inherently toxic to ecosystems. As they have as little interaction with outsiders as possible (save to proselytize), their presence is less a major problem and more a nuisance to scientists who wish to conduct studies in the territory they've claimed for themselves.

The larger and much more pressing issue is that of the Varna Restorationists, who were born in the wake of the Aberrant War from harrowing experiences that united a few traditionalist thinkers from across the Indian subcontinent. They witnessed Aberrants enslave enormous cults, turning them against each other in petty games of war or setting themselves up as incarnate gods, but to these thinkers it was the permissiveness and fluidity of society that allowed the Aberrants to so completely undermine the social order. In the latter decades of the 21st century, some wished only for a stable society. For these few and the followers they slowly gathered around them, the answers lay in the ancient past. Unfortunately for them, the vast majority of the Bharati Commonwealth disagreed, and their ideals failed to spread. In the end they were all but chased out, and only found a home on Far Nyumba after petitioning the UAN. Standoffish and autonomous, the settlement of Sthirata mixes as little as possible with outsiders. The culturally and religiously pluralistic inhabitants of Jifunza and its outlying settlements chafe at the idea of having such a monoculture — an exclusionary one, at that — sharing their colony with them.

Nyumbans' very independent spirit is the source of the second major issue coming to a head — that of colonial governance versus governance from Earth. For six years, the highest authority on Far Nyumba was the Colonial Council, an elected body of civil officials, scientists, and workers. For the duration of the "ongoing emergency," as the locals often call the six-year isolation, the Council worked tirelessly to ensure that everyone got what they needed whenever possible, and organized relief efforts and mutual aid whenever things fell short. Many Old-Timers have tremendous respect for the thirty or so individuals who participated in the Council over the course of those six years, and especially for Adannaya Ihejirika, a mycologist who was the only member to serve for all six years. The stress of the position turned her hair prematurely grey, but she projects a sense not only of strength but of community, never letting her cool manner drop even in the most heated and tense of situations. She remains a prominent figure in the community, and continues to be active in colony administration. Her word carries a tremendous amount of weight, and she's tried to walk the line between cordial relations with Earth and Nyumban independence, knowing that she might well tip the balance one way or the other — and she has no desire to make that kind of decision for everyone on Far Nyumba.

Now that the UAN Colonial Administration is back in contact with Far Nyumba, the situation is changing. Officials from back home are a constant sight in Jifunza, offering unwanted and frequently inapplicable advice and interfering with local planning. While the local authorities technically have a say in emigration-related decisions, Colonial Administration regularly overrules them. The greatest tension between Old-Timers and the UAN concerns the Varna Restorationists. Most Old-Timers believe the Varna Restorationists' worldview and plans for the future of Far Nyumba are diametrically opposed to their own.

## THE WAY THINGS MIGHT GO

Far Nyumba's future depends on many things. The following are three scenarios demonstrating problems the colony might encounter in the future.

### A STABLE SOCIETY

Sthirata would just as soon ignore the existence of Jifunza, and indeed the UAN, were it possible to do so. The problem is that they aren't self-sufficient — all their supplies come through with the rest, at the primary translocation facility in Jifunza, and many advanced medical procedures are only available in the main settlement. Adults or elders handle any errands in Jifunza, and almost always in groups. Occasionally, one or two youths in Sthirata will hack the computer in one of the communal vehicles and drive the 50 kilometers to Jifunza for a few hours of indulgence and socializing with their local peers.

Already standoffish, the Restorationists have as little contact as they can with Jifunza, but cannot escape the fact that it is the cultural, industrial, and agricultural center of life on Far Nyumba, and their technical autonomy means very little in practice. There is a small but growing movement among Nyumbans to petition the UAN to revisit the colonial license granted to the Restorationists, and at the very least to mandate a greater interconnectedness between Jifunza and Sthirata. For their part, the Restorationists have only isolated themselves further, posting armed guards to prevent any interactions with outsiders beyond dire necessity. Where they got those weapons, largely unnecessary on such a peaceful world, no one is certain — they might have hacked industrial fabricators, or they might have somehow smuggled them onworld. Regardless of where they came from, the Restorationists have them, and they aren't going to accept integration without putting up a fierce fight first. They're outnumbered and have no chance of an armed victory, but many would rather martyr themselves than give up their way of life.

### FREE NYUMBA

Six years of self-rule is a short time in government ledgers, but a long time in terms of the human spirit, particularly when those six years of hardship pulled a diverse community together in solidarity. That solidarity remains, even if the UAN doesn't recognize it as anything more than a legacy of trauma. For Old-Timers, it's something more: a promise of a Far Nyumba that owes its allegiance to none.

This will almost certainly be a conflict of laws, protests, and campaigns, for no one save a few radicals who blame the UAN for their isolation in the first place would seriously consider violence against their progenitor nation. Jifunza is a place of learning and debate, and that will color any independence movement that springs up from the nascent pool of revolutionary fervor. Protests will fill the streets of Jifunza, and will even reach the streets of the UAN

thanks to the work of Old-Timers on Earth who still have Nyumban sympathies and are willing to organize on their comrades' behalf.

The UAN, on the other hand, is a government. Pluralistic and open, to be sure, but it's a rare government that willingly cedes territory. To their mind, Far Nyumba is the result of tremendous investments made by Africa as a whole, and Far Nyumba must remain a part of Africa for all that it's more than 10,000 light years from Earth. The financial picture alone demands Far Nyumba's submission to central authority: the colony's disappearance was a significant blow to many UAN member governments who had heavily invested in the project, and some of their economies are still recovering from the sudden loss of colonial support services as an industry. Those economies are flourishing post-recontact, and they've no desire to give up a stabilizing factor.

There is a chance, if a small one, that the conflict will go hot. Foreign agents from the FSA or another nation with bad relations with the UAN could agitate and empower a handful of radicals to employ violent means in the name of liberation, all to provoke the UAN into taking overt action against Far Nyumbans and turning the colony against the central government. Those agents might already be in place, having streamed into Jifunza with the new wave of immigration, secretly working behind the scenes to undermine the jewel of Earth's collective colonial efforts.

## BEYOND HUMAN

In Balance, the Perezistas live in harmony with nature, and continually re-engineer themselves in search of a fleeting harmony with the Gaea-Hypothesis spirit of Far Nyumba. They don't mean to stop there, however — all worlds with life, they say, possess a spirit, and Mgitu too has an ecosystem and a potential Gaea to commune with. The Perezistas aren't about to let little things like a toxic atmosphere, pressure, dangerous fauna, or radiation stop them. The project is still in its infancy, and there are numerous potential models for biological modifications allowing permanent aerial inhabitation of a gas giant, but they are making progress, and sooner or later one Perezista or another will take the plunge, literally.

The project is, of course, completely unknown outside Balance, but when locally cultivated biotech transports begin lifting off and making routine flights between Far Nyumba and Mgitu, people in Jifunza are going to start asking questions. Those questions are only going to get more pointed when they discover what those transports are leaving behind — human beings, or something that was once human, depending on one's point of view. A potential conflict with the Perezistas might spark sooner, if someone discovers what they're up to, but otherwise it's likely to be a flashpoint crisis, as the lengths to which Erin Perez's followers are willing to go to follow her example becomes shockingly clear.

The situation might degenerate into violence on one or both sides, and if it does, the Perezistas will literally turn the ecosystem of Far Nyumba itself against their enemies, vanishing into the deep jungle and layering defenses of natural toxins they are immune to — to say nothing of the more advanced applications of biotech sciences. In extremis, Perezistas might well try to destroy key hardtech infrastructure, and if Jifunzans complain that it will make it difficult or even impossible for them to survive, the Perezistas will offer them a choice: join them, leave Far Nyumba, or starve.

# MGITU

Little larger than Jupiter but more than ten times as dense, Mgitu might have been another companion star to SS1515a if it had managed to gobble up only a little more mass as the solar system was forming. Instead, it occupies a strange place between planet and star, a Y1 brown dwarf. Too warm for ammonia (with an average temperature of a little over 320 Kelvin), its clouds are water vapor, blue-grey and white streaks against the warm red-orange of the deeper hydrogen sea still radiating heat from Mgitu's failed attempt at fusion eons ago. Mgitu is not only remarkable for this reason, but for the teeming biosphere that sprawls across its enormous face, and for the Zep facility floating in its atmosphere.

## NATIVE LIFE

Mgitu's biosphere is highly stratified by altitude, roughly following Mgitu's many cloud layers, with autotrophs (life that produces its own energy from photosynthesis or chemosynthesis) in the highest reaches and skimming the lightless boundary of the supercritical hydrogen below. Between them is an immense stretch of open atmosphere, where more complex life feeds upon these autotrophs. Beneath that, in the central layer (relatively thin but still hundreds of kilometers wide), live predators who feed on the life that feeds on autotrophs. Only a few forms

of life transcend these divisions; by far the most common example is the beanstalk, an enormous taproot stretching from a broad canopy that reaches down to harvest heavier chemicals from the lower autotrophic zone.

The top layer of Mgitu's ecology, occupying its highest cloud layer, is primarily photosynthetic. The flats were the first species discovered; some of the largest specimens are visible from low orbit with the right equipment. Their broad construction allows them to float and to absorb as much of the star's light as they can. Other, smaller photosynthesizers exist at this level, virtually all sessile, although the pufferfish, which only loosely resembles its terrestrial namesake, can swell up to 30 meters across, inflates itself to drift high into the atmosphere, and releases its pent-up air in a jet to flee from predators.

Beneath the photosynthetic layer is the first heterotrophic zone, where mobile life rides thermals up to the photosynthetic layer to feed. This is the primary habitat of the airwhales, each of whom hosts a miniature ecology of various scavengers, symbiotes, and parasites. Tanglemoths follow in their wake, alternating between a highly active flurry of independent jet-fueled insectoid scavengers by night and huddling into a writhing mass by day, interlocking their circulatory systems and sharing nutrients as they ride updrafts like tumbleweed.

The middle heterotrophic zone is the domain of predators, scavengers, and little else. The swifts are the best known of the hunters who originate from this zone, as they often soar far higher in search of prey. The electrically charged thunder-saucers hunt by electrolocation, whipping their twin tendrils ahead of their broad shells and generating an arc powerful enough to weld with — or breach the hull and fry the systems of a drone, whose EM signatures seem to drive them into a hunting frenzy.

Beneath this lies the lowest heterotrophic zone, where sunlight begins to fade as it filters through cloud layer after cloud layer. Predation here relies chiefly on scent or electrosensory organs, and thunder-saucers are one of the more successful varieties of hunter here. Their primary competition are the rarely sighted krakens. These creatures are long, limbless, and covered in chitinous spines. During their infrequent hunting ventures higher into the atmosphere they charge headlong at prey, spear them

## HOW DID THEY DO IT?

We're leaving open the question of whether the Zeps employed quantum, noetic, or inspired powers — or, for that matter, any combination of the three. The fact of the matter is that the Zeps' distributed biology and thought are both so alien to human norms that it might not even be possible for humans at their present level to distinguish the difference in a being like a Zep. Each individual creature that made up a single Zep may have been no more psionically active than the typical latent, but with the help of its thousands of fellows it was able to create vast noetic powers as each focused itself on a single coherent thought. Each creature might be an intelligently engineered aspect of a larger quantum entity, a single nova-like host from which all Zeps descend. Zeps might have simply relied on a total mastery of inspired hardtech to construct the wondrous facility they left behind.

Ultimately, what matters is this: the Zeps were here, and now they're gone. Maybe they're hiding somewhere else. Maybe they've transcended material reality. Maybe they're dead, and that little lump of left-behind Zep-flesh is the key to resurrecting an ancient species. What matters is what role they'll play in your story, and that's up to you.

on their needles, and deflate their buoyancy organs, dragging their prey to a depth where pressure crushes them. Scientists speculate that in the lightless depths, they hunt in precisely the opposite manner, dragging prey to an altitude where their own internal pressure makes them burst. What few observations researchers have made suggest that krakens can even survive forays into the supercritical ocean of hydrogen, which may indicate that other orders of life exist even below the furthest observed reaches of Mgitu's atmosphere.

The lower autotrophic zone skirts the edge, and perhaps descends deeper into, the superfluid hydrogen layer, where gases are compressed so such a degree that they become supercritical, existing in a state akin to both liquid and gas. All life here is either chemosynthetic or makes very brief forays to such depths to hunt things that are. The roots of beanstalks spread wide and thin in this region, reaching tendrils to skim volatile organics from the very boundary of supercriticality where the intense pressure crushes, dissolves, and then belches forth detritus from above.

### RUINS OF THE ZEP FACILITY

In 2122, a biological survey was the first to spot the enormous spheroid, which they assumed to be another example of Mgitu's strange and cyclopean ecology. Dozens of kilometers across and covered with filter-feeders, it was an easy mistake to make until direct observations revealed its true nature. The facility is an aerostat, a balloon-like structure filled with a gas lighter than the surrounding medium, generating lift while simultaneously providing a habitat. The Zeps constructed this envelope from a rigid and incredibly strong carbon-based material, stronger than diamond and far less brittle.

The interior of the aerostat consists of more than a dozen cells, each over five kilometers across, connected by cavernous tubes that could easily admit all but the largest of human spacecraft. These cells are, occasionally, subdivided further. Some contain what seem like control surfaces, larger than usual for human use but still strangely small compared to the overall structure. One cell is overgrown with strange fauna, light and diaphanous, that radiates clashing hues. Another is spiderwebbed by environmental processing machinery that has lain quiet for millennia. Throughout, various artifacts lie as if casually cast aside. At the center of the aerostat is a chamber hosting what human scientists believe is a teleportation device, a glowing sphere nearly half a kilometer across, with no apparent control mechanisms. Psions have probed the sphere, but have failed to provoke any kind of response — there isn't even a consensus on whether the sphere operates on quantum, subquantum, or some other kind of as-yet-undiscovered principle.

No one has launched a crewed expedition to the Zep facility — its location in the middle heterotrophic zone of Mgitu's atmosphere means swifts often patrol the area, and other forms of life that tend to interfere, often dangerously, in human endeavors. However, a recent discovery made by clairsentient investigators charting the interior touched off a massive push to visit this vast relic: a bit of mummified tissue, overlooked at first, that seems to have belonged to a Zep.

## THE ZEPS

The Zeps were not native to Mgitu, but visited it from another world some 15,000 years ago. They left behind what, to humans, seems to be a massive colony, but further investigation revealed a sobering truth — it was, at best, a small experimental outpost, for the Zeps were massive on a scale no human could be prepared for. The Zep facility housed perhaps thirty individuals.

Zeps were, as best as clairsentient investigation can reveal, similar in appearance to the terrestrial man o' war jellyfish. Most of their bodies consisted of a vast living gas bag filled with hydrogen. Dozens of specialized tentacles dangled down from this gas bag, but unlike the native airwhales, they were smaller and could move relatively rapidly, propelling themselves with muscular gas jets, like a squid's siphon. Zeps varied in size, and continued growing throughout their millennia-long lives, but were never less than a hundred meters in diameter. They possessed impressive and deeply alien senses, and were able to both sense and emit EM radiation from infrared all the way down to long wave radio, which they used for communication.

# KARROO MINING COLONY

Karroo is a testament to human spirit and endurance. Perched in open space, orbiting a neutron star spewing out intense radiation inimical to physical life, protected by a rocky "shield" formed from the loose remains of a planet blasted to pieces thousands of years ago, Karroo has faced tremendous difficulties. The alien Chromatics attacked the mining colony without warning or apparent reason. The desperate colonists' weaponry was largely ineffective but narrowly managed to repel the invaders. They'd barely had enough time to jury-rig alternative weapons for themselves when the "frogs" regrouped for another assault, which the men, women and children of Karroo also defeated, at the cost of many human lives. While the colony recovered and tried to make sense of the hatred in the alien's actions, the Upeo wa Macho disappeared and severed Karroo's only ties to Mother Earth and hope of external resupply with no idea when — or if — the teleporters would ever return.

Karroo shouldn't have worked as long as it has. It should have failed in the dark time after the Upeo wa Macho disappeared, and before ex-mayor Susan N'gamba revealed herself to be a teleporter, bringing Aberrants from Eden to save the colony from a major Chromatic push. Even without the aliens, the mining station should have long since suffered some catastrophic failure of a system vital to life support. The oxygen recyclers and bioscrubbers should have outlived their artificial lifespans years ago. And the Chromatics still lurking in the asteroid cluster should have amassed sufficient firepower to destroy the entire colony by now. Yet Karroo lives on, with the ingenuity of thousands of skilled and dedicated people working together to find ways to overcome all these obstacles. Karroo is their home, balanced on the knife's edge of survival and chaos, now with an influx of outsiders from recontact with Earth, all thinking they know better than the survivors. The Karrooans haven't given up without a fight before, and they're not about to now.

## THE CRAB NEBULA

No planet supports life anywhere near Karroo. Indeed, the mining colony has no star giving daylight, or rotational period providing day and night. The gaseous remnants of obliterated planets flow lazily in the void, dancing about in irradiated winds and constantly glowing in shifting colors, as different elements discharge absorbed energies across the electromagnetic spectrum.

Karroo's supergiant star exploded 8,000 years ago, spewing forth its dying wrath just shy of the speed of light. Planets evaporated, reduced to their component molecules with the force of the blast before boiling away into subatomic particles from the intense heat and radiation that accompanied it. The stellar explosion continued to spread, engulfing nearby star systems years later as the shockwave swept through them and continued. The blast slowed as it spread and lost energy as it destroyed. The star at the epicenter of the destruction wasn't quietly dead; it gathered leftover mass within its gravity well and smashed it back towards the center, growing ever denser until it collapsed under its own weight and became a pulsar fountaining forth deadly radiation.

Karroo itself resides in the outer reaches of the Crab Nebula that resulted from this cataclysm, close enough to the Crab Pulsar for the radiation to

rapidly kill unprotected humans, but far enough for adequate shielding to reduce the danger and allow colonization. The mining station is in a region of the nebula that rarely suffers the full force of the star's spinning emissions. In addition, the dense, disk-shaped asteroid field formed from the remnants of several planets further protects the colony from the pulsar's radiation.

## SHIELD

What was once one or more planets and moons is now a roughly disk-shaped conglomeration of rocks of varied shapes and sizes, 200 million kilometers in diameter and 50 million kilometers thick at the center. Nothing tethers these rocks to one another except gravitation and the radiation waves breaking against the disk. The nebula's gases flow around the disk's edge as the radiation drives them away from the pulsar, curving around and inwards in graceful arcs around Karroo and reforming millions of kilometers behind the station, enclosing the colony in a mesmerizing gentle light display shaped like an acorn as big as a solar system.

Without this loose agglutination of asteroids, dust, and gases, it's doubtful that Karroo would have survived at all. Human engineering ensured the mining colony had sufficient redundant shielding systems built into the structure to withstand the hostile stellar environment. Over the colony's lifespan various sections have required repair and replacement from sometimes hastily manufactured materials, any one of which could have been a catastrophic failure that might have jeopardized the inhabitants. Because it founders built Karroo deep inside Shield, amidst a large cluster of nearby asteroids, the vast mass of rock and ionized gasses between it and the Crab Pulsar absorbs sufficient radiation to allow repair teams the time needed to mend these failures.

Karroo residents find comfort in Shield's presence, looking on it as an element of security and safety (hence the name), and not as a planetary corpse left behind by the unimaginable fury of a dying star. Many Karroo locals use Shield as a reference in their daily activities. Residents refer to locations in the mining station as "Shieldward" or "voidward" depending on their proximity to the rocky guardian. Also, certain asteroids and planetary fragments have sufficient landmarks or unique shapes that miners use them as quick conversational reference points when describing how to find the richest locations to harvest.

## CELESTIAL TREASURE TROVE

Karroo is valuable because the heavy elements and materials that are difficult to find and extract on Earth (or other terrestrial planets) are free-floating in the Crab Nebula. Shield is the primary location for this activity since the destruction of the planets exposed rich ores and rare minerals that were once buried deep within these planets' crusts and mantles. Breaker ships scuttle about the asteroid field like ants scurrying around a dead animal, tearing it apart piece by piece. The Breakers continually stream back and forth between the asteroids and larger Hauler ships —which in turn run a continual circuit between the mining sites and Karroo's refinery modules. While the Breakers and Haulers fulfill most of Karroo's general purpose, more specialized Harvesters work the edges of Shield searching for exotic compounds thrown out by the pulsar's high-energy emissions, or formed by the interaction between these and strange precursors within the asteroid field.

Beyond Shield's edge, Karroo's Trawlers haul gigantic "nets" to capture the blasted high energy ions and molecules riding the pulsar waves out into space. Electromagnetic gradients and other charged elements automatically divide much of the captured material into crude sorting ready for one of the station's industrial modules to further refine. Though these nets are often the least profitable portions of the mining, they were vital to Karroo's survival in the dark times as they provided additional oxygen that allowed the colony to top up the slow but inevitable losses that came from aging scrubbers and recyclers. Now with resupply from Earth these nets are less necessary but the residents of Karroo still diligently dispatch Trawlers as a matter of pride and practicality. Earth deserted Karroo once — Karroo's not about to place its entire trust in a distant planet to save them.

In the earlier days of the colony, the few clears surveyed the regions outside the protected bubble

| THREAT | DAMAGE RATING | TAGS | THREAT TYPE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Crab Pulsar Radiation | 5 | Aggravated, Continuous (minute), Deadly | Environmental |

for particularly rich or unusual bounties. Teleporters carried a container filled with zero-g miners in protective suits with specialized equipment, or sometimes a small ship — depending on the perceived value of the haul and their individual power levels — and grabbed what they could and returned before the radiation overwhelmed their smaller protections. With Earth contact reestablished, this practice has begun again, sometimes with added protection offered by perikinetics, who greatly extend the time the mining crew can work before everyone needs to retreat or suffer radiation sickness and other injury.

## RESEARCH AND BIOLOGY

Karroo has been home to scientists since its founding. Initially they arrived to help the residents overcome the challenges of deep space living in the inhospitable Crab Nebula. Then xenobiologists and others fascinated by the alien Chromatics came despite the danger. Those who were there when the colony was isolated turned their skills to the practical challenges of keeping the station running and developing better ways of repelling the increasingly desperate waves of Chromatic attacks. Then, a year before Earth re-established contact, the miners of Karroo found a site containing extensive, if fragmentary biological samples from one of the planets whose remains became Shield.

With the reestablishment of links to Earth and the other colonies and news of the discoveries, excited researchers and scientists were quick to arrive at Karroo in the hope of also uncovering something new, or being the first to solve the mystery of these life forms and whether they possess any relation to any known living creatures, like the Chromatics.

Ancient fragments of alien biology aren't the only draw Karroo has for researchers. The unprovoked Chromatic attacks and their lingering presence in the Shield asteroids made Karroo the front to humanity's interstellar war, but also the prime point for the growing field of human xenology. Karroo's forces have captured various samples of Chromatic technology throughout the war, and many of the aliens' corpses. They've had less success — and frankly less inclination while cut off from Earth — in capturing live specimens. The Chromatics are willing to commit suicide to avoid capture.

Karroo already had facilities dedicated to studying the Chromatics and their technologies when survival was the population's only focus. The Æon Trinity recently connected a new asteroid to Karroo and supplies it with new resources and potent defenses, transforming it into a dedicated space called Chromatic Research Facility Two. Though smaller than CRF-1 on Earth, CRF-2 is the premier location for understanding the Chromatics, has attracted the best human and Qin minds in the field of study, and is now one of the busiest scientific and military research locations in human space.

### CHROMATICS OF SHIELD

Some scientists who come to Karroo hypothesize that the shattered worlds humanity now mines may have once been part of a greater pre-Chromatic civilization who suffered great technological and social regression when the star collapsed. The prevailing theory postulates that these Chromatic ancestors possessed significantly more powerful psionic abilities, including teleporters of their own. Sensing the final days, these pre-Chromatics fled far from their homeworld, hoping that the planets they ran to would be distant enough to avoid the dying star's rage. The Chromatics who ended up on Chrome Prime (p. XX) suffered tremendous hardship from arrival, diverting all their psionic power to photokinesis just survive the harsh solar radiation. As the theory runs, the Chromatic teleporters were some of the first to die as they lacked the photokinetic strength to survive. The surviving creatures adapted further over the intervening thousands of years, losing even more Modes and Aptitudes that weren't directly relevant to everyday needs.

These researchers have little proof to back their theories but hope to find such in the asteroids near Karroo station. They believe if they can extract any genetic material from them, the recently discovered biological samples may be the evidence needed to cement their research and establish their credibility and reputations in the xenological field. Indeed, their theories even stretch so far as to say that the search for their lost home is the exact reason why the Chromatics came to Karroo almost as soon as they regained the ability to do so via captured human teleporters.

## LIVING IN KARROO

Though it's officially designated a human colony, living in Karroo is more akin to living in a hardtech spaceship. Interconnecting metallic cylinders make up most settlement, each rarely longer than a hundred meters and many far shorter. Although the microgravity environment places less stress on the structure than it would suffer if it was in a terrestrial environment, nothing can eliminate all movement between bustling sections which in turn leads to torsion and higher maintenance requirements.

Each cylinder generally includes several floors running its length. Standardized construction engineering and design usually allocates around three meters height per floor for living quarters and support functions like station management — including subfloor and ceiling for life support ducting, electrical conduits, and other service necessities — leaving the floor to ceiling height for most of the station at just over two meters. Exceedingly tall individuals are a minority at Karroo, most left in the early days as they felt cramped with a sense of claustrophobia.

Though Karroo is a working platform focused on survival, its inhabitants adapted to its unique environment and learned to overcome some of their inherent design biases. While the early UAN construction teams combined asteroid and human-construction in a largely regular lattice approach, the long-term residents realized that they could ignore the usual vertical and horizontal limitations. They attached new cylinders at angles from the central asteroids that formed the nodes of the colony network without needing to consider the orientation of other cylinders.

Fitting grav crystals to each one ensured it maintained a sense of "down" regardless of the direction a neighboring cylinder might take. This design unsettles visitors who have only seen Karroo from external angles and vids, and expect to spend most of their time climbing or descending uneven tunnels. They find it disorientating to discover that no matter which direction they go, they always feel as if they're walking along horizontal ground. The locals built airlocks between most of the differently angled modules, both for safety and to avoid visual confusion. However, a few of the most recent additions lack these airlocks. Most visitors find walking through Escheresque corridors to be exceedingly disorienting, but the locals grew used to them years ago.

Each asteroid has had its interior carved out — processed for ore and other valuable components — and refitted for human use. As central nodes between the different corridors, many of the asteroids have sections designed to promote the sense of community

and recreation for Karroo's residents. These areas are often large open spaces by Karroo standards but still feel small for those used to living on an actual planet. Almost every asteroid not entirely devoted to industrial processes has at least one hydroponic park, with each one working to recreate the flora and sense of one of Earth's great wildernesses.

## COMMUNITY

Karroo's population was born from a gold rush spirit, a mix of hope, opportunity, and greed, and tempered by the fires of misfortune and violence. When the UAN team established Karroo they brought construction specialists, scientists, and the first miners to begin work on the station itself. Many didn't stay long after sufficient habitats and storage facilities were in place, preferring to return to Earth for their next big job.

Most of the second wave of colonists still didn't think of themselves that way even though they brought their families with them. Karroo was a temporary experience, to build wealth and return to the safety of an actual planet with enough in the bank to sustain them for years to come. Life in the artificial environment wasn't easy. Everyone had access to necessities, but the cramped confines — especially in the early days — and lack of relief from other people exerted psychological pressures that some struggled to cope with. Most who were ill-suited to Karroo's lifestyle left the station before the teleporters vanished.

By 2115, when the Chromatics first attacked, the population consisted of those who had fallen in love with the hard but unique lifestyle, and those who had arrived within the last year or two for their opportunity to work hard and set themselves up for the future.

Their isolation and reliance on a cascade of systems to allow humans to survive gave many Karroo residents a sense of comradery and community that binds them against all others. Religion is more common on Karroo than in many modern Earth-based nations and the people of Karroo — especially those who arrived in the early years and lived through the first Chromatic raids — treat each other like family. They quarrel and fight amongst themselves, taking sides in shifting alliances and holding grudges and feuds close to their hearts, but quickly abandon any such tensions if outsiders interfere. This perspective has also made it more difficult for the colony to accept new arrivals as true Karroo residents until they've demonstrated in some tangible fashion their dedication to keeping everyone safe and alive.

## PSIONS

Even in the dark years, Karroo wasn't entirely without psions' help. A small number of dedicated individuals were part of the community when the Upeo wa Macho vanished. At first the neutrals demanded answers from the psions, threatening to become violent in their desperation. To the psions' credit, they didn't meet the challenges with force and managed to calm the situation with the help of Karroo's mayor and major corporate backers.

To soothe tensions, Mayor Susan N'gamba chaired public councils where the people of Karroo could question the psions, the station's government, or the corporate power brokers, with an understanding that they would provide any answers they possessed. These forums quickly revealed that the psions were in the dark as much as anyone, but they were also determined to helping the colony survive. Ill feeling soon dissipated; the Karrooans were scared but didn't really believe the psions were members of a shadowy conspiracy. The public hearings helped remind the population that they knew the psions as friends, family, and colleagues, and it was easier to hate faceless psi orders than people they knew.

Over the years, Karroo's psions have played an important part in keeping the station running, mostly because their Aptitudes were well-suited towards a smoothly functioning station anyway. Æsculapian medics, electrokinetic engineers, and stranded psychokinetic Legionnaires from the young 7th Legion were the most common Aptitudes on the station before recontact. Recontact bolstered their numbers — especially psychokinetics with the Legions' expansion and refitting of sections of Karroo as a deep-space naval outpost.

## RICH AND POOR

Though Karroo has a strong sense of community born from the shared struggle of its population, it isn't an egalitarian society where everyone has equal opportunity and reward. The dark years brought a degree of balance but money provided by mining corporations and other commercial interests built Karroo, and they remain eager to see profit from their investment. As such, the enclosed Karrooan society has both rich and poor. No one starves, but that doesn't mean everyone has what they want.

The corporation's representatives sit at the top,

with access to the biggest quarters, the best food, and largest proportion of the profits. Service providers, professionals, and administrators who keep the station running smoothly occupy the next rung, with a comfortable lifestyle by station standards. Miners and laborers who do much of the actual work tend to be the lower class, working for wages and whatever percentage of the profits they managed to negotiate into their contracts on taking the job. Most of these people came to Karroo chasing the dream of building wealth and returning to Earth to a much more comfortable existence. While they generally have less comfortable quarters and working conditions than their social "betters," they're paid well for the work they perform and expect to retire comfortably someday — if they can resist the temptation to spend too much of their hard-earned funds on luxury goods or illicit entertainments.

Below all these people are the few without useful skills or trades. Although they can't make a living through legal means, these often desperate individuals find that the underground elements to the station always need some unsavory duties performed. For some Karrooans such work is the only way they can afford to live.

During their long isolation, these social and economic divisions became far less important, because everyone understood they needed to work together to survive, and might never see Earth again. As a result, Karroo became notably more egalitarian, and the corporation representatives soon lost much of their status and their privileges. However, recontact with Earth brought new corporate officials whose ideas about power and authority are very different from those of the Karrooans. Several administrators worry these changes could increase tensions on this station.

## CRIME

Where people want more than they can afford, crime soon follows. Karroo has its share of gangs looking to take advantage of opportunities or the unwary. Some of the larger gangs run protection rackets around the mining industry, demanding payment from workers in exchange for their deep-space equipment not suffering catastrophic damage or sabotage. Others control gambling, unlicensed prostitution, and illicit drug markets aboard the station, offering whatever services the customer wants and is willing to pay for. Criminals with programming skills maintain hacks on facilities around the station, selling codes that bypass maker protocols and allow creation of limited amounts of illicit drugs and personal weaponry. The gangs keep their own law and order as everyone is keenly aware of how fragile Karrooan life is. The unwritten law that no crime shall endanger the station is ironclad. Melee weapons, tasers, and low-penetration sonic and flechette pistols are acceptable, but anything that might penetrate Karroo's thin skin is not.

Recently one gang has risen above the others, bringing a higher order of organized crime to Karroo through resources, intimidation, and where this fails, brutality. The Shabeel — tigers, in Somali — have succeeded in establishing a hold in every black-market industry. What they don't control, they tax from other gangs, accepting tribute in exchange for not murdering offenders and their families. The Shabeel now have supply chains to Earth and other colonies, demonstrating the ability to get whatever people want, for the right price. Rumors abound about how the Shabeel manage such trade, with whispers of the gang secretly being a front for the Norça, or somehow linked into a shadowy teleporter network operating behind Bolade Atwan's back.

## POLITICS

Regardless of class distinctions, all Karrooans rely on their government to smooth over problems and keep the station working. In the station's earliest days government was a mix of UAN and corporate interests. When the African Union decided to cede control of Karroo to the people living there, it ensured that every registered resident had a say, thereby preventing corporate interests from controlling everything.

So far, this system has worked well, possibly aided by the isolated years that saw corporate employees embrace the need for everyone to work together to survive the hostile environment. The Karrooans elect a mayor who appoints individuals to oversee various aspects of the station, including law and order. The corporations and citizens' groups nominate individuals to sit on a legislature and decide policy for Karroo. Some have even started quietly discuss whether to officially recognize the Shabeel, bringing them inside the circle to get more control over their activities.

The people of Karroo recognize that reestablished contact with Earth and other human settlements may make life easier, but their isolation has forged a fiercely independent streak and a lingering suspicion

about how hard anyone really tried to help Karroo when they were cut off. Leading the way among the influx of new people coming to Karroo are the psi orders, particularly Legion soldiers who resupply and supplement their threadbare 7th Legion garrison, and Orgotek researchers, who seek to study both the nebula and the Chromatics. Karrooans aren't yet sure how to take these new "saviors." The revelation that their former mayor was a teleporter all along and could have helped even before the desperate defense against the Chromatics, leads most Karroo residents to have at least a small measure of distrust of even the Upeo wa Macho.

# KHANTZE LU GE

A prime example of a dream turning into a nightmare, Khantze Lu Ge is the first human colony outside the Sol system founded without nova assistance. It was already 40 years old when teleporters made extrasolar colonization practical. China wanted the first colony world to be part of an escape plan as the Aberrant War began in earnest, and they were successful, enjoying growth and a measure of peace away from the rapid, and often violent, changes back on Earth. And now, more than 50 years later, the refuge became the front lines of the new war with the superhuman monsters.

As the most mature of the colonies, Khantze Lu Ge began to show the kind of turmoil that makes communities grow stronger or slowly collapse, with a population composed of three generations, various ethnic groups and nationalities, and even biological distinctions.

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

When astronomers discovered it, Khantze Lu Ge's only pros were its relative proximity to Earth, and its mostly breathable atmosphere produced by sea microorganisms. Other than that, Khantze Lu Ge is a giant, sterile lump of rock and sand, with small seas that are toxic with salts and minerals that prevent easy desalinization and purification.

With low geologic activity and mild weather patterns, the planet's mountains are low and sharp, and rivers flowing from the polar ice caps have not had time to carve their beds into the rock and are generally shallow, although drinkable, unlike the water in the sea.

Alpha Centauri B, the star around which the colony orbits, provides dim and weak light, while Alpha Centauri A's light is more like a very bright moon than a sun; when both stars are opposite to each other around Khantze Lu Ge, the colony's sky is locked in a six-month twilight.

These conditions began to change when the first unmanned vessels set down the infrastructure that the colonists would need. Terraforming technology created patches of arable land as polar air factories in the north made the atmosphere thicker by pumping it with oxygen, nitrogen, and other human-breathable gases.

The environment began to decline steadily back to early colonization levels when the Aberrants attacked, as the invaders either sabotaged or destroyed the air production facilities and interrupted all terraforming activities.

## NEVER ENDING WAR

The first wave of LuGeian settlers arrived in 2064, fleeing from the beginning of the Aberrant War. Most were Chinese, with a small group of Ecuadorians, Bolivians, and Peruvians accepted in the mission thanks to their natural acclimatization to the thin atmosphere in the mountaintops of the Andes.

The second wave of colonists, who came from various countries apart from China, found that the original settlers had almost doubled their population in the years since they made planetfall, and the colony was thriving, well on its way to terraforming the soil and air.

The last wave arrived a couple of years later by the hand of the Upeo wa Macho, and transportation and communication between Khantze Lu Ge and Earth became almost instantaneous.

China sowed the first seeds of discontent when they tried to assert their authority over the colonists. The first settlers and their children did not take kindly to newcomers who were telling them what to do on the planet they have been surviving most or all their lives.

Talk of independence and civil war began to spread and China was afraid they were seeing a repetition of the conflicts in Averiguas, but all such talk stopped as soon as the teleporters disappeared and the planet was cut off from Earth. This state of

affairs was familiar to the first- and second-wavers, and business continued as usual, although with more caution as open conflict would hurt the colonists more than help them.

And then the Aberrants attacked. Fortunately, China's security forces remained on Khantze Lu Ge, as well as sizable contingents from the psi orders. The Aberrants expected an easy victory over the LuGeians, but did not expect psions to be around to help.

However, the Aberrants led by Kali were too many, and they attacked with insane ferocity, managing to overrun the entire north and capture the arcology and spaceport of Kuan. To prevent Aberrant forces from having access to air and space vehicles, a team of electrokinetics destroyed everything that could fly in Kuan as they retreated.

Earth maintained contact via telepathy, and the colony received secret assistance from the Upeo wa Macho. But everybody knew that it was only a matter of time before the Aberrants had the entire world under their heel.

Forewarned about the war, the UN sent the first Leviathan, Sava, packed beyond nominal capacity with reinforcements. The psionic backlash of the Leviathan's jump preceded a swarm of fighters, bombers, VARGs, and crack Legion squads that demolished the Aberrant forces occupying the cities of Yangra and Guaman and drove them back.

General Roland D'Chana, the officer in charge of the reinforcements, assumed command immediately, but the UN forces' advance was not smooth. Kali and Yog-Death put aside their differences and joined forces to stop the new arrivals, and both sides had enough casualties to convince them that head-to-head confrontation would not end well for either side.

Since then, the war rages on. The Sava is on permanent Khantze Lu Ge detail, even after the Upeo wa Macho returned, and keeps the colony supplied, taking back the wounded, and returning with fresh troops.

But it's still not enough. With crises small and large emerging throughout settled space, Earth cannot muster sufficient forces to deal a decisive blow to the Aberrants, and the planet is now in stalemate. Both sides make advances and the other side pushes them back the day after; UN and Æon teams continue

## PROJECT HESTIA

The Æon Trinity's Triton division created this initiative to deal with Khantze Lu Ge's problem with Aberrant spies. Many human spies working for the Aberrant Kali do so against their will, with the clear understanding that Aberrants will torture and kill their families if they refuse or fail to provide results. When the Ministry or Æon's own telepaths discover such a spy, they find everything they can about the hapless spy's family, and Hestia operatives remain on the lookout for them in their forays to the North. When operatives locate a spy's family, they do everything in their power to mount a rescue operation.

To date, they have only rescued three families, they found six more already dead, and two failed rescue operation ended in the death of both the family and the Æon agents, and the list of unaccounted families is 17 and rising. If Kali knows about Project Hestia's efforts, she does not consider it a threat, as her methods have not changed.

to rescue prisoners and escapees, and the Aberrants keep infecting humans with Corruption. It's a war of attrition where both sides have large supplies of everything.

The Aberrants have a major advantage, however. Since they control the northern hemisphere, they also control Khantze Lu Ge's air production facilities and the major terraforming complexes as well as the industrial infrastructure, and everything stopped working. The air is thinning by the week, and everything is returning to its inhospitable base state.

## THE COLONIAL GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Since China's bureaucracy was too far away to be effective, the first colonists formed their own government, based on their actual needs and not what Earthbound bureaucrats thought they required. The Committee began with 30 community representatives chosen not by territory, but profession, which includes governmental administration.

The Committee expanded as the colony constructed new arcologies, and numbered 45 when the Aberrants began their incursions. The current roster numbers 26, but they keep the vacant seats open as a reminder of the people trapped behind enemy lines.

In these times of war, Committee members act as liaisons between the people they represent and the UN and Æon officers, trying to keep the rising discontent from escalating and forcing the stationed military to act against the populace. While cooperative, they are not subservient, and everyone in the Committee, starting with Chairperson Jiang, are quick to assert their authority and remind the newcomers that the people of Khantze Lu Ge have a voice.

## CIVIL AND MARTIAL LAW

The colony's laws were based on China's, although the survival needs of the early days of the colony forced a more relaxed approach. Crime was low, violence was rare, and the people resolved most disputes with civil rather than legal codes. The first wave arrived with pre-appointed officials to direct the colony's growth, but with communications disrupted during the Aberrant War, Khantze Lu Ge instituted a Colonial Governance Committee that appointed a new chairperson every 10 years.

The current chairperson is Wan-Le Jiang, a second-generation LuGeian whom the Committee selected before Chinese officials arrived with the first teleporters. China not only accepted her leadership, but also appointed her Chairperson of the Office of Interstellar Affairs.

Jiang proved she deserved the position when the Upeo disappeared. Khantze Lu Ge did not suffer any of the problems that plagued other stranded colonies. Her trial by fire came with the Aberrant assault. She learned from her initial mistakes, and designed a logistics program that optimized rescue and evacuation while providing resistance forces with supply caches to cover their slow retreat in a holding strategy where the main purpose was to buy time until Earth sent reinforcements.

Unfortunately, when help arrived with the UN and Æon forces, it also came with martial law. Chairperson Jiang maintains all her civil authority, but she's often countermanded by General D'Chana and Etienne Seville, the Proteus agent commanding the Æon Trinity forces. Under martial law, the military considers any aggression against UN personnel treason and is punishable by death, although no soldier or officer has yet to enforce this, and Æon

advisers encourage the UN military to keep this level of restraint. Also, any officer can requisition goods and services from any civilian. General D'Chana expects the colonists to follow these rules to the letter, but Æon agents manage to notify Chairperson Jiang of any impending confiscation and the UN officer in charge finds a member of the Colonial Governance Committee waiting to smooth things over.

This pull and push between UN and local authorities achieved an uncomfortable balance; on the good side, this prevented further loss of morale and slowed down the rising crime rates. Unfortunately, this is also wearing down General D'Chana's patience with civilians, as well as that of some of his officers.

## THE ROLE OF ÆON

The Æon Trinity has its hands full in Khantze Lu Ge, as the crisis engages every single division and department in this star-spanning organization. Rescue workers deploy along UN assault teams to get civilians to safety, armed security helps protect secure areas, logistics officers distribute supplies from Earth and local production as efficiently as possible, and diplomats help ease the tensions between the native LuGeians and the UN forces.

However, the most critical part of Æon's mission is to deal a decisive blow to the Aberrants. To this end, they coordinate with the psi orders in covert missions. Proteus saboteurs join forces with Norça infiltrators to go deep into the occupied North to extract as much intelligence as they can from the Aberrant forces. Back in the South, they help Ministry telepaths and ISRA clears to ferret out Aberrant spies

A lot of this work happens behind the UN's back, especially out of sight of General D'Chana, who would use Æon and the psi orders as blunt objects when they are more effective as precision tools. This goes double with Æon's work with the northern resistance forces. Operatives supply resistance fighters with weapons and intelligence, along with escape routes if Aberrents begin to suspect them.

## LANDS UNDER SIEGE: THE SOUTH

Morale in the settlements still free from Aberrant occupation is low. People expected a swift end to the months of desperate war when reinforcements arrived. The Aberrants' advance halted and the battle lines are stable, with most conflicts consisting of swift skirmishes, but any victories are usually short-lived.

Forecasts are grim, and optimism is a luxury, but LuGeians know about endurance and take pride in that they clawed prosperity out of barren lands, and held as long as they did while outnumbered and overwhelmed. Martial law reigns in all the arcologies. UN military patrols enforce a strict curfew and are always on the lookout for both petty crime and the clandestine activities of Aberrant sympathizers. Chairperson Jiang extracted a provision from General D'Chana that allows her to suspend the curfew under special circumstances, and she uses it judiciously to balance morale and logistics.

Business as usual means that work ultimately supports the war effort. Supplies arrive steadily from Earth so there is no food shortage that would force rationing, but the farms and food processing facilities work around the clock to supplement the imported meals.

Environmental technicians are working relentlessly to improve arcologies' air circulation to compensate for the steadily thinning atmosphere, while Chinese engineers work with Æon and Orgotek experts to find a solution for the water situation.

Travel between arcologies is severely restricted, with checkpoints set up at access points and traffic hubs. The only functional flying vehicles belong to the UN forces and Æon, and so civilians must jump through many hoops to travel. While this helps in curtailing the movement of Aberrant sympathizers and spies, it also restricts the communal bonds that helped Khantze Lu Ge thrive in the first place.

## YANGRA AND GUAMAN

These two Chinese arcologies were the first UN forces recovered during their initial assault. Although they spent less than six months under Aberrant occupation, the horrors UN forces found gave the rest of Khantze Lu Ge the first real look into the fate that awaits them should the Aberrants succeed. In addition to starvation and evidence of various atrocities, medical relief personnel also found numerous cases of Quantum Flux diseases, including a few not recorded anywhere else.

As the northernmost arcology free from the Aberrants, Yangra became the forward headquarters for UN forces, and thanks to the Legions, Orgotek, and China's government, it also became a fortress, with automated defense systems and heavy artillery capable of holding back major Aberrant assaults. This forward base allows the UN and the Legionnaires

to deploy their transports in response to any attack along the northern battle lines.

The military moved survivors from Yangra to Guaman or all the way to P'ang Lai as the UN turned Yangra into their first line headquarters. The few civilians who remain work in support roles for the UN military, turning Yangra into a military camp.

Commander Biru Selam leads the Yangra military base. He schedules patrols and coordinates closely with Æon and the psi orders when choosing targets for small operations. He does not agree with General D'Chana's general strategy, and is an active voice of opposition to any plan that includes D'Chana's idea to bomb the entire North with nuclear strikes.

Guaman became extremely lively after its recapture; Councilman Yazhu Shao, a maintenance technician who recently joined the Colonial Governance Committee, spent the months of occupation leading a resistance movement that mobilized in tandem with the UN assault. He is now the civilian head of government in Guaman, and his bold leadership and practical ways endeared him to both the general population and the UN forces.

Under Shao's direction and in cooperation with Commander Luisa Ladehesa, Guaman is a major logistics hub for the war effort, channeling supply shipments and troop movements from the southern arcologies into defensive lines or to Yangra. The people of Guaman are out for Aberrant blood, and they volunteer for patrols and general military service with an enthusiasm that has some UN officers worried, especially after witnessing events in the North.

## P'ANG LAI

The colonial capital remains P'ang Lai, the first arcology built on Khantze Lu Ge, despite Kuan soon overshadowing it as an industrial powerhouse. With the fall of its northern counterpart, P'ang Lai is once more at the center of events in Khantze Lu Ge.

Chairperson Wan-Le Jiang's office is in the administration district of the arcology, and she ceded some of the best-equipped office space for use as the UN's and Æon's command centers. The Colonial Governance Committee also holds sessions in one of the public auditoriums, where the topic of the day is frequently the colonists' discontent. Independence from China is another frequent topic that has arisen more frequently. Councilperson Jiang keeps discussions tempered by bringing up the wartime situation as well as paying token loyalty to the motherland, but it is widely known that, as a second-generation LuGeian, she sympathizes with the idea.

Lian Yi, the Ministry representative, splits his time between managing the telepaths' activities with Æon and the UN and his job as a government official. Yi arrived in the third wave and his unwavering loyalty to China puts him at odds with the Committee's existence, let alone their policies. He only attends Committee meetings as a courtesy, but often he deals with General D'Chana behind Councilperson Jiang's back. While Yi considers D'Chana's plans detrimental to China's interests, he is becoming convinced that China can absorb the civilian losses if it means ending the war quickly.

P'ang Lai is fairly secure at this point in the war, so the UN uses it to allow soldiers to rest while waiting for redeployment, as well as to treat the wounded, both civilians and military. The Æsculapians operate several satellite clinics around the arcology in addition to the two hospitals they upgraded with their own technology.

Because it is where settlers and newcomers interact, P'ang Lai is also a hotbed for the growing number of people who resent China, the UN, the Æon Trinity, and even psions in general. The LuGeians are angry because their hopes for a rapid resolution dissolved, and because they have the general impression that the off-worlders are not doing enough to win the war; some even believe they are prolonging it on purpose.

These rumors did not spread naturally. Aberrant sympathizers and spies are the most active in P'ang Lai, stoking rumors and spreading conspiracies that paint the Earth reinforcements in as bad a light as possible.

Proteus counterintelligence specialist Zhao Feng oversees rooting out Aberrant presence in all Khantze Lu Ge's communities, but he focuses his effort in P'ang Lai. He has identified not only spies coming from the North, but also from Earth. He has apprehended cultists from the Legion of Mal who are the party behind many of the anti-psion sentiments in the colony. It is unknown whether the Legion of Mal has contacted Kali or Yog-Death, but Æon is treating it as a possible risk.

## OTHER ARCOLOGIES

Europeans and Sudamericans from the second colonization wave built Neu Berlin, Nuevo Cuzco, and Libertade. The largest remaining farms are adjacent to these arcologies. As atmospheric conditions

worsen, crop yields are smaller with every passing year, forcing the settlers to expand their hydroponic facilities.

People not modified for life on this world make up the majority of the population in these arcologies. By necessity, the early colonists constructed these structures from better materials, using more advanced technology. This means the arcologies' design included more efficient ventilation and pressurization, making them ideal residences for the civilians who arrived in the third wave as well as retired first-wavers who moved from the first settlements. The realities of war have not sunk so deeply in the mindset of the southernmost arcologies as they have on the original settlements, and thus the people are more relaxed about martial law and UN presence.

## NO MAN'S LAND: THE FRONT LINES

Months of savage fighting between the Aberrants and UN forces scorched the land north of Yangra and the equator. Both sides use temporary small outposts as launching points for operations deeper into enemy territory. The scorched-earth tactics that the original settlers adopted in the first days of the war marked the land; the landscape is dotted by the burned-out husks of buildings that offer little shelter or tactical advantage, and with the remains of machinery and equipment destroyed rather than left behind for the Aberrants' benefit.

Soldiers assigned to the front lines bring back tales of the Aberrants' inhuman tactics: mutated and brainwashed settlers sent as cannon fodder, toxic water pools glowing with Corruption, and Aberrants wearing captive humans as armor during raids.

Aberrant opposition stalled the advance of the UN's army, and this frustrates General D'Chana, who sees the war as a personal affront and a problem to solve, and civilians and non-combatants are an annoying factor he'd rather ignore. He has brought up more than once the idea of dropping fusion bombs on the entire North to get rid of the Aberrants and just mourn the victims of collateral damage, but he faces opposition practically from every quarter, even his own subordinates.

D'Chana regularly visits the front lines accompanied by a small squad of special forces. He often refuses the company of anyone not part of his handpicked team. Æon suspects that D'Chana might be setting up a situation that would support his nuclear strategy, but there is no evidence to confirm or deny this, and the ambient Corruption in the area makes clairvoyance projections difficult and unreliable.

## LIVING IN HELL: THE NORTH

Æon estimates over 400,000 people remain in the Aberrant-controlled areas and psionic surveys reveal most of the population lived in or near three major settlements. The Aberrants herded the survivors from the smaller outposts and farms for easier domination.

Abandoned buildings litter the northern regions of the planet, and an acrid smell floods the thin air, getting stronger around settlements where Aberrants live. The arcology of Kuan and terraforming stations Zhuanxíng 3 and Zhuanxíng 6 are the three centers of Aberrant activity in the occupied zone.

Three arcology cores sit unfinished closer to the north, all their workers either murdered or herded to Kuan. Orbital scans reveal that the half-completed arcology closest to Kuan could be a good staging point for any offensive starting with a teleporting insertion, but psionic exploration is difficult because of the high Quantum Flux in the region.

## THE ABERRANT FORCES

The Aberrant known as Kali was the original leader of the invading hordes, and even as Yog-Death betrayed her and caused their forces to splinter, she strengthened her position by keeping Kuan and all its amenities. The UN has classified both Kali and Yog-Death as Prime Threats, and they have not appeared on any battlefield since the UN forces arrived, not wishing to expose themselves to each other's treachery. However, their lieutenants and followers have no such fears. Around 180 Aberrants crawl, slither, stumble, and sometimes even walk in the captured settlements. Kali commands around 120 Aberrants, with only 20% of that number in the Terat category, with the rest divided evenly between Nemesis, Divergents, and Sub-Aberrant Mutants. Yog-Death, while commanding fewer of his kind, has the same number of Terat-level monsters as Kali, with a higher proportion of Nemesis. However, few of the Sub-Aberrants he creates survive for more than a single battle.

The number of mutants is increasing all the time as Kali and Yog-Death corrupt the captive LuGeians and send them off to fight their own people, driven insane by their transformation. Kali structures her forces intelligently. Her subordinates use team

tactics and a pyramidal chain of command. Yog-Death, in contrast, has an unruly horde of extremely powerful psychopaths.

Kali's most dangerous forces are, however, her small corps of spies and assassins: composed mostly of Divergent-class Aberrants who can pass for humans, human cultists, and unwilling agents coerced into serving Kali lest their families suffer terribly. Æon's fears are well-founded, as Kali's spies recently contacted the Legion of Mal, who hide among the people of P'ang Lai. These groups may be planning a strategic strike together sooner than later.

## KUAN

Kali's power hub, Kuan, is slowly but surely falling apart due to lack of maintenance, the damage sustained during its capture by Kali's forces, and the continuous scavenging by the inhabitants trying to survive. Kali keeps the arcology's hydroponic farms, because she prefers her chattel to be useful when she wants them.

The Aberrants known as Khan and Washout are Kali's main slave drivers, selecting and classifying people by expertise and vulnerability to extortion in order to join Kali's indentured spies. The lands around Kuan were previously fertile, but Corruption is already manifesting and the few plants that can still grow are twisted and likely poisonous, but the desperate population harvests them anyway.

Kali is trying to find a capable engineer to put back together the wrecked flying machines the defenders left behind, but most of the people in northern Khantze Lu Ge are environmental engineers and terraforming technicians, with little to no expertise in military technology. She's already planning to kidnap people from the south, with now a wider selection thanks to UN personnel.

Between loyal sympathizers and cultists, Kali planted a robust espionage network among the humans, with her chief spy embedded with the forces in Guaman. Known as Unumbra, this Divergent-class Aberrant passes as human and her powers to bend light around her are subtle and used mostly for camouflage purposes when she skulks in the shadows.

Kali has so convinced herself of her superior position, tactics, and innate superiority that she is not aware that Proteus and Norça agents are slowly infiltrating her ranks and collecting information on her actions and plans.

## THE RESISTANCE

Hidden in the depths of Kuan's maintenance corridors, survivors from the initial attack do their best to fight against the Aberrants. Equipped with old weapons and an intimate knowledge of the arcology's layout, their swift attacks and sabotage do little more than inconvenience the weakest of Aberrants.

However, they refurbished the aqueducts built to bring water from the pole to create a small network of passages that connect Kuan with at least two terraforming facilities and an unused water reservoir further south. The Resistance eventually contacted Æon Trinity scouts who found the reservoir entrance. Æon has not disclosed the existence of the tunnels to General D'Chana, but it figures heavily into any tactical outline. Project Hestia is already making use of the Resistance's tunnels to rescue the families of Kali's spies, and to provide the freedom fighters with better weapons, explosives, and people who know how to use them.

# MARFISA

If Marfisa had a unified planetary government, its motto might be "the road to Hell is paved with good intentions." Its creators built this colony as a refuge from the Aberrant War, but from its founding, its inhabitants have struggled for survival. The two most significant and damaging events in Marfisa's history came at the hands of the same beings who claimed to offer safety and prosperity. Now the promise of those long-lost goals and the fear of poisoned gifts threaten to plunge the original colonists' descendants into outright war.

## A GREEN AND PLEASANT WORLD

The late Nova Era was a time of unprecedented, and often undocumented, interstellar exploration. There are no known records of Marfisa; indeed, Angelica's entries in contemporary stellar catalogs indicate no habitable planets lie in its liquid water zone. Æon now believes an unidentified party (not Project ReWrite) deliberately suppressed all knowledge of Marfisa.

Marfisa is strikingly like Earth during the Ordovician Period. Carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere are relatively high thanks to active vulcanism, yielding a mild greenhouse effect that melted most of the ice caps into shallow seas. The same volcanic activity also elevates sulfur dioxide concentrations, so Marfisan rain is slightly acidic, which further complicates the development and maintenance of technological infrastructure.

Located just north of the equator, the world's single supercontinent Orlando contains most of the planet's land. Orlando's northernmost portion is in the process of breaking away, and intense seismic activity makes this region uninhabitable. Colonization efforts initially centered on Laguna Tuscano, an immense south-facing crescent bay, and later spread into the Otago Divide, the ring of jagged hills and blocky plateaus surrounding it. Only a few remote settlements exist beyond the Otago in the continental interior.

Other than Orlando and its coastal islands, Marfisan land exists only as small volcanic island chains along plate boundaries, and Aorangi, a mountainous granite extrusion rising from the southern polar ice cap. Marfisans are aware of these features but lack the transportation capabilities and impetus to explore them. The Æon mission has likewise charted the planet remotely but hasn't set foot in the unpopulated regions.

Native Marfisan life is recovering from a global extinction event 50 million years ago. A slow-motion die-off was already well in progress thanks to warming temperatures, sea level rise, and consequent changes in ocean chemistry. However, the finishing touch was an impact event that created Laguna Tuscano and scoured Orlando with fire and tsunami. Today, hardy primitive pisciforms and hard-shelled hexagonally symmetrical nautiloids dominate the seas, while lush yellow-green plant life, flightless insects, and circular gastropod-equivalents rule the land. Local plant biochemistry is mostly incompatible with terrestrial life, though several pisciform

species are edible (and a few will attack and consume humans with no apparent ill effects).

After fourscore years of habitation, most of the world's biological hazards (at least in the Laguna Tuscano region) are well-known. Land for crops or livestock is laborious to clear and maintenance-intensive to work, though neither task is more intrinsically dangerous than it would be on Earth. The greatest obstacle in raising crops is the large gastropods dubbed "dinner platters," who find terrestrial vegetation delicious despite its long-term toxicity.

Marfisa's single satellite, Virago, is a captive carbonaceous asteroid with little evident value. There is evidence of past excavation at several sites, presumably part of Babbage's preparations for the colony's intended growth, but no sign of ongoing activity or Corruption. Virago lacks atmosphere and water and its low mass generates only minimal tidal activity on Marfisa.

## THE FOUNDING

According to Marfisan history, the Aberrant known as Tunnel Rat (née Rosetta Traversini, also likely an alias) discovered the world in 2040. Tunnel Rat's powers included the creation of wormholes with theoretically unlimited range, but only to locations whose gravity, air pressure, humidity, and temperature were within a few percentage points of her current environment. This seeming limitation enabled her to cast blindly about for Earth-like worlds. Marfisans believe she explored several other planets before locating theirs.

Tunnel Rat's partner was Babbage, a hyperintelligent nanoengineer and cyberneticist based in Dunedin. Marfisan records hold it responsible for the colony's original concept as a seedpod world, a hub from which humans using technology derived from Babbage's designs could spread through another region of the galaxy without further Nova assistance. Under the auspices of its engineering corporation, Babbage managed the mission's organization and logistics while Tunnel Rat recruited compatible groups who were seeking an escape from the first spasms of what would become the Aberrant War.

Alone, it's unlikely that either Babbage or Tunnel Rat would have doomed the colony. When Tunnel Rat's warp tunnel destabilized, the worst effects struck Babbage's quantum machinery, which formed most of the colony's equipment. Had Babbage's machines traveled via another method, or had the colonists relied on conventional technology, the outcome would have been far less crippling. As it was, five million people found themselves stranded, with their surviving transportation, communication, power generation, and medical equipment capable of supporting only a few percent of their number.

The original colonization plan called for a single city, Endeavor, ringed by constellations of satellite communities, and Babbage had already used autonomous construction equipment to prepare basic infrastructure. The ready availability of shelter and roads, along with the preparation of cleared land ready for planting, saved the colony.

Tunnel Rat recruited colonists from around the world. The plan to integrate culture and communication via ubiquitous machine translation burned with the rest of Babbage's quantum computing hardware. Instead, the settlers concentrated with their fellows, resulting in a scattering of culturally distinct enclaves. The need for mutual support drove some linguistic consolidation, dominated by the Libyans, Egyptians, and Kiwis who settled in Endeavor. Today, most Marfisans speak a mixed language of New Zealand English and a North African dialect of Italian heavy with Arabic loan words. Some isolated communities cling to their forebears' tongues, including at least one language Earth's scholars believed dead until Marfisa's rediscovery.

Babbage's original infrastructure, the presence of several non-technological groups on the mission, and ample printed books (largely undamaged by the warp tunnel's collapse) enabled the colonists to halt their regression. The first Marfisan generation lived at a mid-19th-century level of technology, with Earth's Industrial Age history providing a roadmap for redevelopment. However, the colonization plan had assumed nova-created resource extraction methods, with low environmental impacts and minimal personnel requirements. Instead, a brute force approach proved necessary, leading to Endurance's founding in 2068.

Like so many other plans, Marfisa's ideal of universal cyberdemocracy fell by the wayside when the colonists arrived. While all agreed emergency powers were necessary for resource management and strategic planning, the geographic distribution of five million people meant a unified government was impractical. The resulting compromise was a bluntly named Survival Committee drawn from subject matter experts in essential fields, chaired by former Libyan Red Crescent Society administrator Hafsa Karimi. The Committee made the hard

## THE 1980S OF THE 2120S

Marfisan technology is comparable to that of the 1980s, albeit with some major divergences. Most obvious is the rarity of motorized vehicles due to the planet's lack of a readily accessible petroleum analogue. Personal transportation is mostly horse- or ox-drawn, while the few road vehicles run on biofuels distilled from native plants. Perhaps a dozen hand-built aircraft exist, forerunners of an aviation industry not yet needed. Steam trains provide long-distance ground transportation, urban mass transit in the two cities uses electric trams, and sea voyages remain at the wind's mercy.

Plastics are rare, replaced by metal, ceramics, or natural Marfisan plant resins. Stylistically, Marfisan products resemble Soviet or Eastern European designs of the latter 20th century: rugged, blocky, unrefined. Hydroelectric plants in the Otago foothills supply power, with hydrogen fuel cells just beginning to enter use.

Marfisans have radio capabilities but this technology is only common in Endurance and its daughter communities. Fearing the Pandorans will engage Pandora in conversation, the Preservers emplaced powerful jammers around Endeavor. This security measure's price is the loss of the airwaves across most of the Laguna Tuscano's coastal plains, though the allure of Endurance's news and entertainment stations drives a thriving gray market in receivers. Moreover, in outlying communities where the telephone wires don't yet run, scratchy two-way radio, whether amateur or government, is the only means of long-distance communication when it can punch through the jamming.

Marfisan fashion tends toward natural fibers and, with a chemical industry's recent re-emergence, riotous colors. Outerwear and hats are common canvases for personal style. Citizens of Endurance and its offshoots tend toward quasi-industrial attire with more frequent use of leather.

Before Pandora's arrival, the Marfisan arms industry was small and tightly controlled. The absence of dangerous land fauna meant only police and deep-sea sailors could justify the need for lethal force. The Preserver-Pandoran conflict has seen surges in both sanctioned manufacturing and cottage machine-shop industry, and officials now frequently overlook the latter. Weapons manufactured in Endurance and Endeavor are on par with mass-produced firearms of the late 20th century, while garage-built ones more closely resemble easy-to-machine 1940s wartime designs.

Marfisa's dirty secret is that none of this could have occurred without nova-created technology. Though few admit it today, some of Babbage's creations survived the warp tunnel collapse, albeit in damaged form, and they were essential to industrial redevelopment. Most subsequently broke, but not before helping jump-start the colony.

triage decisions. Backing from the nascent planetary police force, led by Karimi's husband Yusuf, ensured most settlements cooperated with even the harshest anti-hoarding and redistribution measures. The Committee also drew on the colonists' collective knowledge to compile the Blue Books, a series of pamphlets containing essential agricultural and medical information. The greatest evidence of the Committee's effectiveness, of which Marfisans are grimly proud, is that no one died of starvation or malnutrition during those first desperate years.

As the colony transitioned from difficult circumstances to long-term recovery, the Survival Committee wound down its activities. With it went the last vestiges of planet-wide government. The modern Committee exists as a coordinating body for scientific and reengineering standards, publishing updated Blue Books as needed. It also brokers assistance compacts for major projects that require multiple communities' resources. It's tried to take an advisory role in the matter of the Pandora artifact but it lacks the ability to bind or compel. Marfisan governance exists only at the city or town level, with each community using Blue Book No. 51 (Colonial Legal and Ethical Standards for Peaceful Coexistence) as its starting point.

## THE DARK SATANIC MILL

Marfisa celebrated the 22nd century's dawn as an era of renewed hope. The previous generations'

painful recovery was giving way to a self-sustaining industrial renaissance. In every community (at least, every one that wanted technology back), the standard of living was approaching that which the few remaining original colonists remembered. With no knowledge of events on Earth after 2042, most Marfisans felt their grandparents were fortunate to outrun a global apocalypse. The latest literary trend was lurid speculative fiction about the present state of a ruined Earth. Many colonists believed Marfisa was the last outpost of otherwise-extinct humanity.

Every Marfisan knows where they were at 8:06 A.M. on March 5, 2103. At that moment, a massive physics anomaly occurred in the residential neighborhood of Caledonia. Geometry flexed; reality bent; tendrils and shockwaves of energy lashed Endeavor's eastern suburbs. When the rubble stopped bouncing and the screams faded away, more than 100 people were dead or missing. In the middle of the smoking, twisted ruin sat a gleaming 136-meter metallic cube.

The contemporary Marfisan position on Aberrants was one of fear and loathing. Marfisans only had to look at their own history to see the cost of trusting an Aberrant's promise, and the shattered horror at Endeavor's heart was permanent proof of the ruin Aberrant powers brought. The city dissolved into chaos as most inhabitants attempted to flee, and it took over a week for local authorities to restore order. The police force, its ranks hastily expanded with ill-trained volunteer deputies, established a security cordon. Marfisa's few scholars of Novatech, formerly pariahs, found themselves heroes of necessity, leading a task force to study the artifact.

On March 15, an attempt to x-ray the cube triggered a response. The cube began a radio broadcast, identifying itself and its purpose. The broadcast became a 41-hour infodump, providing detailed information on the cube's manufacturing capabilities and instructions on the steps necessary for full activation.

Colony-wide awareness was inescapable and immediate. Reactions were most pronounced in the major cities. Endeavorites, already traumatized by the initial incident, saw this as a precursor to invasion, enslavement, or genocide. Hundreds of kilometers away and isolated from the initial shock, Endurance's citizens heard in the cube's voice the fulfillment of their dreams of a better life. Endurance swiftly dispatched a humanitarian relief and engineering assistance mission, but a fearful Endeavor rebuffed these efforts. This interaction set the tone for the seismic shift in planetary unity.

The following year saw major migrations as majority adherents to each philosophy drove out their opponents. By mid-2104, the south was staunchly Preserver and the north was a haven of Pandoran sentiment. Ironically, this forced resettlement aided both factions in diversifying their skill bases, with conservative industrial workers moving to Endeavor and forward-looking agricultural experts settling in Endurance's circle of influence. The first armed conflict erupted later that year, when the police force of Pandoran Al Jawf attempted to prevent a group of Preserver miners from taking their equipment south with them. News of this fight sparked similar violence, pre-emptive seizures and detainments, and a colony-wide wave of vigilantism. In response, both major cities began organizing peacekeeping militias, which rapidly evolved into small standing armies.

The subsequent two decades have seen sporadic conflict moderated by survival imperatives. With the breakdown of a mostly peaceful integrated colonial economy, both factions diverted resources to becoming agriculturally and technologically independent of one another. While far from complete, this effort is now sufficiently advanced for each side to feel it no longer relies on the other for comfort and prosperity. Twenty years of steeping in propaganda also left each faction with an exaggerated view of the other's demands, a perspective exacerbated by the very real extremists who would happily destroy Pandora (if only they knew how) or feed all Endeavor into the machine's fabricators (if only they could turn them on).

## PLACES TO RECONNOITER

Endeavor and Endurance drive the current conflict and hold the largest populations but Marfisa's six million people inhabit nearly 200 towns and villages, not counting hundreds of smallholdings where a single family or a small coalition has struck out on its own. The Æon reconnaissance mission has yet to investigate more than a handful of the most prominent communities in detail.

### ENDEAVOR (POP. 550,000)

Sprawling across the Karimi River's alluvial plain and clinging to the surrounding low plateaus, Marfisa's largest city is an untidy torus. The original hub-and-spoke street plan long ago gave way to unregulated growth as Endeavor expanded. Surrounding the city, farms, and ranches sprawl for tens of kilometers in every direction. Endeavor

is the colony's center of agriculture, trade, learning, and fine arts. Endurance's swift growth meant heavy industry was slow to take off here, with serious development beginning only after the Preserver/Pandoran split, and local manufacturing capability still lags behind.

Even in the hardest post-settlement years, Endeavorites never saw themselves as frontier-dwellers. Its designers created this city to be the colony's capital, with cultural, commercial, and government elements equally important. Although governance rapidly become decentralized, Endeavor enjoyed undisputed dominance of Marfisan affairs until Pandora arrived.

Endeavor's layout is typical of original colonial sites, with a ring of new construction surrounding a vacant city core. Modern Marfisans hold a superstitious dread of Babbage's creations and refuse to reside in pre-colonial buildings. This urban wasteland, the Scar, is unpopulated save for a few dozen mad exiles with nowhere else to go. Endeavorites prefer going the long way around and will take a shortcut through the Scar only in daylight and only in groups. At its center, a hastily erected brick wall conceals the Escheresque nightmare knot of machinery, architecture, and human and animal remains that the warp tunnel collapse vomited into the city's heart.

## ENDURANCE (POP. 330,000)

Endurance was the first Marfisan population center built purely by colonial hands. Located in a high valley in the Otago Divide, and founded to exploit mineral deposits essential to resurrecting industrial civilization. While initial settlement was supposed to be volunteer-only, some communities took the opportunity to offload their misfits and troublemakers. From the beginning, Endurance was a classic frontier town, albeit one with its roughest edges planed away by the reinventors and reengineers who came here to recapture technology.

A 200-year roadmap for bootstrapping an industrial base guided Endurance's development. Now, 55 years after its founding, it's accelerating past the plan's 75-year milestone. Citizens are fiercely proud of going from mining with hand tools to early assembly-line manufacturing in three generations. "We'll figure it out," is Endurance's response to adversity.

Progress came with a price tag. Endurance has all the pollution, dangerous working conditions, and poor sanitation of early industrialization. Smog shrouds the valley in which the city sits and communities downriver struggle with chemical runoff. The average lifespan here is a decade shorter than the colony's average and many officials believe it will drop further as doctors identify chronic health problems they've only read about before.

Surrounding Endurance are several dozen second- and third-generation settlements. Colonists built them to sate the colony's growing hunger for stone, ore, timber, and hydroelectric power. Since relations with Endeavor chilled, Endurance founded agricultural towns on the savannah beyond the Otago: insurance against a trade war with the southern food producers. Without exception, these daughter towns align firmly with Endurance's Pandoran outlook.

## SEMARANG (POP. 22,000)

A sprawling inland agricultural community, Indonesian Mennonites founded Semarang. They were essential to the colony's early survival and found many enthusiastic converts. Today, Semarang is as much of a hub as exists for the loosely organized Marfisan Mennonite faith, which numbers 125,000 adherents.

Like their terrestrial forebears, Semarang's citizens are socially conservative and discourage the use of technology, though they don't outright ban it. Semarang has its own small hydroelectric plant, which powers essential medical and food preservation systems only. They primarily use muscle, animal, or wind power. The town is largely self-sufficient, save for pharmaceuticals and raw ore. It's also home to the only printing house outside the major cities.

Marfisan Mennonites were staunchly apolitical, which caused few problems until Pandora's arrival. Now, a schism is developing between those who advocate continued separation from colonial politics and a growing Preserver-aligned faction. Those who've gone so far as to aid the Preserver cause in armed conflict have suffered shunning and excommunication.

## PRAIA ESMERALDA (POP. 8,400)

When most Marfisans speak of this remote island enclave, it's with a scowl and a gesture of warding. Its inhabitants are alone in their veneration of Babbage and Tunnel Rat, clinging to the belief that the novas were saviors. They believe some tragedy or betrayal by outside parties, not Corruption or capricious godlike whim, caused the colony's ill fortune.

Named for its odd beaches of smooth copper-veined stones, Praia Esmeralda is a tropical paradise by Marfisan standards. It's not completely isolated, as its social status and remote location make it a haven for sailors who wish to avoid notice — or who don't want anyone asking questions about their cargo's provenance. The Esmeraldans aren't an Aberrant cult, but they could become one easily, and they're militantly Pandoran. They also don't advertise the fact that they have Marfisa's only surviving collection of working Novatech, having taken the last scraps of Babbage's creations when they settled here.

### NOVA BRESCIA (POP. 2,400)

Nova Brescia began as a smallholding, a collection of six extended families' farms allied for mutual benefit. Equidistant from Endeavor and Endurance, it professes neutrality in the Preserver/Pandoran conflict. After dark, its residents look the other way for the right price; many barns are stopovers for smugglers moving goods between the cities, profiting whenever increased tension drives a crackdown on legal trade. It's also a center of illegal arms manufacturing, with at least five hidden shops turning out hand-built pistols and submachine guns in friendly competition. Perhaps because the town is so well-armed, the smugglers don't cause trouble here, though evidence of violent ambushes and double-crosses litters the surrounding forest.

## PANDORA

Despite twenty years of cautious study, Marfisa knows very little about Pandora. After its initial radio broadcast, the intelligence controlling the cube opened several inspection ports, allowing a limited number of explorers to enter its innards and confirm its claims. To all appearances, it is what it says: an automated manufactory, pre-loaded with templates for almost all technology in use in 2042. Its activation requirements are simple: a supply of distilled water and external power for its electrolytic hydrogen separators, which will enable it to bring its hyperfusion reactor online. When fully powered, it will be capable of limited mobility, enabling it to move to a more convenient location (the inhabitants swiftly abandoned the once-prosperous Caledonia). Appropriate raw materials will let it produce industrial machinery that will render it self-supporting. Once that's

done, it will fabricate whatever the colonial government requires of it.

Despite several attempts to damage it, the cube is impervious to all projectiles or chemical explosives Preservers have deployed against it. Indeed, it is seemingly unaware of these attempts, having never responded to or even acknowledged them. It neither tarnishes nor accumulates grime, and its doors open on request. Outside itself, it communicates only via radio, though direct verbal communication is possible inside.

The artificial intelligence originally identified itself as "Babbage Systems Unit Three-Zero-One," but has adopted the Preserver name "Pandora" with what sounds like detached ironic awareness of the implications. It uses New Zealand English, speaking in a feminine voice (though only a few Pandorans use the feminine pronoun for Pandora). Opinions are divided on whether it's sentient or a well-programmed emulator. It seems to view itself as both the cube and the persona within, stating that the two are inseparable. It's willing to discuss any subject within its considerable knowledge base.

The Æon reconnaissance mission has approached Pandora with extreme caution. No direct contact or observation of the interior has yet occurred. Psions report a slight sensation of Corruption at the edge of the security perimeter around Pandora's site, but of a sufficiently low level that proximity is harmless, and observers have seen no sign of any Quantum Flux diseases on Marfisa. Most troublingly, both telepaths and electrokinetics can sense a massive, powerful, and thoroughly alien intelligence within the cube, implying that Pandora is truly sapient.

# RUAN'S WORLD

Founded as a training facility, Ruan's World became a refuge when the Upeo wa Macho fled known space in 2115. For seven years, it served as the order's hidden redoubt, isolated save for a trickle of support to other extrasolar colonies and a bare handful of covert missions to Earth. With the Upeo recontact, its inhabitants have the opportunity to reintegrate into human society — but not all of them want to.

## UNDER A BLOOD-RED SUN

Ruan's World's most defining feature is its star. Tidally locked to its primary, the planet's orbital rate of 46 days matches its rotation rate, keeping one hemisphere in perpetual sunlight and the other in eternal night. The substellar point, at which Axum is directly overhead (in local parlance, the "hot pole"), remains within a degree or two of 80ºC, while the opposite antipodal point (the "cold pole") hovers around –75ºC. Much of the planet's water remains locked in frozen seas on the night side or deep aquifers on the day side.

The atmospheric dynamics of a tidally locked planet make Ruan's World weather harsh and unforgiving. The planet's slow rotation generates two strong, swift east-west jet streams, which spawn vicious storms with distressing frequency. Plant life is tougher than it looks and well-anchored to survive, while most animals have some way of burrowing or anchoring themselves when the wind comes. Flying species have a well-developed sense of the atmospheric changes that herald storms and are quick to go to ground.

The constant wind has left broad swaths of Ruan's World barren and rocky. However, tidal and tectonic forces have wrenched its topography into sharp relief. In the twilight band between light and dark sides, and in (relatively) sheltered valleys and on the leeward sides of mountain ranges, native life is profuse, ranging from single-celled organisms to multiton ruminants. The low gravity facilitates flight and gliding, so several small predatory species have evolved wings or gliding-membranes. These prey on a variety of lighter-than-air organisms that achieve lift through gas bags filled with biologically generated hydrogen.

While there are unconfirmed reports of immense avian-equivalents soaring on distant thermals, all large fauna species catalogued so far are land-based, with the largest reaching dinosaurian proportions. Predatory aggression, territorial behavior, and giant herbivore trampling all have claimed colonists, with 44 deaths recorded. The most dangerous known animals are the pack hunters dubbed diata: human-sized, slate-blue bipeds with prodigious leaping ability. The kwiri, a purple-striped quadruped the approximate size and shape of a large terrestrial draft horse, is an opportunistic predator and scavenger known for confronting biologists over other creatures' remains. The long-necked nine-meter herbivores called mashujaa are deceptively fast

when defending their grazing territory, and their robust physiology sets the requirement for the personal weapons Ruan's Worlders habitually carry outside Freedom.

Most Ruan's World animals are four-limbed, with rubbery skin ranging in color from cerulean blue to emerald green to a purple edging into black. None have external eyes or ears. Instead, they perceive their world with various forms of vibration-sensing organs and a distributed network of subcutaneous infrared receptors. Natural weapons include beaks, claws, bone scythes, and circular lamprey-like grinding maws. Some prey species carry armor in the form of flexible subdermal scales or spiked plates.

These life forms graze or hunt through a variety of plant life, most of which has some form of moisture-rich feathery frond as its leaf-equivalent. Vegetation ranges in color from aquamarine to deep purple. The largest fronds reach several dozen meters' height when they can grow in valleys, canyons, or the leeward sides of mountains.

Little is known of native life beyond the twilight band. Closer to the hot pole, the terminator's lush vegetation gives way to parched savannah and mineral-saturated seas, then desert, then scorched and barren wastes. In the opposite direction lies alpine tundra, then ice seas and polar wastes lying perpetually frozen under eternal night skies.

## DANGEROUS ANIMALS

Ruan's World has an abundance of life, but the following are two common species that cause trouble for humans.

### DIATA (MODERATE THREAT)

Ruan's World's most dangerous known predators are the human-sized pack hunters known as diata. Roaming their territories in family units of up to eight individuals, they're capable of taking down almost any land animal and have no fear of humans. Most diata are slate blue in color, with a body plan resembling a 2.5-meter theropod dinosaur with long, spindly arms and a flat, eyeless, spade-shaped head. Each disproportionately long forelimb ends in a single blade-like claw and normally remains folded across the diata's thorax until the creature strikes. Diata hunting tactics are similar to those of terrestrial wolves. Packs often harry prey for over an hour until the victim's endurance fails.

**Primary Pool:** 8 (animal cunning and savage attacks)

**Secondary Pool:** 6 (implausible acrobatics)

**Desperation Pool:** 4

**Defense:** 4

**Health:** 5

**Edges:** Free Running 1, Hardy 1, Swift, Tough Cookie

**Natural Weapons:** A diata's claws have the Edged, Melee, Quality 2, and Reach tags.

### MASHUJAA (MEDIUM THREAT)

The elephantine mashujaa grows to nine meters in length. Most of that is the long neck that allows it to forage at the tops of Ruan's World's trees like a giraffe or sauropod. Dappled in vivid shades of green and turquoise, the mashujaa is hard to miss. It's usually placid, but sudden movements elicit the same threat responses it displays against diata and other smaller predators. Once provoked, a mashujaa chases attackers (or a perceived threat) well beyond its normal territory, and its size and stamina mean no human can outrun it on foot. Mashujaa herds also occasionally stampede, leaving a trail of destruction that can stretch for tens of kilometers.

**Primary Pool:** 7 (foraging and sonorous bellowing)

**Secondary Pool:** 5 (crushing tiny interlopers)

**Desperation Pool:** 3

**Defense:** 4

**Health:** 5

**Edges:** Swift

**Natural Weapons:** Trample — the mashujaa's feet possess the Blunt, Melee, Quality 3, Reach, and Weighted tags.

## CITY IN SHADOW

Located just sunward of the terminator in a sheltered river valley, Freedom is the sole community on Ruan's World. Initially dubbing the outpost Penumbra after its location, the Upeo renamed it in 2116 as a constant (if heavy-handed) reminder of their reasons for self-imposed exile. A few voices

now call for a return to the original name but the order has more pressing concerns.

Popular belief holds that the Upeo established Freedom as an Aberrant-hunting base, staging raids from it to prevent Aberrants from following them back to Earth. The Upeo themselves find this laughable, citing the low-budget "documentary" Aberradicators as its origin. Any Aberrant with interstellar warp capability could reach Earth just as easily as Ruan's World, and the Aberrants' return in 2105 clearly proved they hadn't forgotten the homeworld's location. Additionally, a base expected to be a magnet for attacks would be a horrible place to locate as much of their order's support structure as the planet held by 2113. In truth, Ruan's World appealed due to a specific noetic resonance that made it an easy target for interstellar teleportation.

In addition to serving as a training target (most teleporters' first Long Jumps brought them here), Ruan's World quickly became an emergency support base. Its nature as a readily accessible destination meant teleporters could evacuate patients, retrieve critical supplies, or self-rescue to or from here more easily than most Earthside locations. A Level I trauma center and a warehouse complex stuffed with rescue equipment were among Penumbra's first permanent facilities, and their expansion and upkeep has remained a Upeo priority.

The settlement grew organically around these two functions, as well as attracting scientific talent seeking to study the local biosphere and planetology. In turn, the need for support staff drove further expansion. Early on, Mwitu contingency planners identified the community's dependence on teleporter-carried supplies as a single point of failure. To guard against an unforeseen catastrophe that could cut off the facility and its thousands of nguzo residents, the Upeo invested significant resources in making Penumbra a self-supporting colony. It's uncertain whether this project led Proxy Atwan to consider Ruan's World as an emergency bolthole for her order or whether she subtly steered the colonization efforts to align with a predetermined strategy.

By the time of the Upeo evacuation in 2116, over three-quarters of the order's then-400 teleporters called Penumbra home, as did a third of its other psions and several thousand nguzo. Almost all the remaining teleporters maintained temporary quarters there. The permanent residents brought their immediate families, raising the planet's population above 7,000. The evacuation added another 2,000 to this total, an influx supportable only through rigorous pre-planning and heavy use of the emergency warehouses' contents.

The equipment stockpile, previously derided by Long Riders proud of their just-in-time logistics capabilities, proved its value many times over during the Upeo isolation. Not only did it reduce the order's risk of exposure through covert resupply runs to Earth, it also allowed the rechristened Freedom to support the other extrasolar colonies' most critical needs. Supplies were low by the end of the exile but few items were critically lacking.

The colony's footprint expanded slowly before 2116. After, overcrowding lent new haste to construction. A savvy observer can estimate the age of a structure in Freedom by its technology. The original core was prefab hardtech, with custom-designed expansions coming once the first inhabitants' essentials were in place. Later innovations from Norça first led to hardtech shells with biotech interiors, and then to full biotech architecture. The capacity to grow additional living, storage, and working space from locally sourced biomass enabled rapid and relatively easy growth.

## CITY OF GARDENS

To outside observers, the most remarkable thing about the Ruan's World colony is its inhabitants' mental health. Few display signs of the depression and other disorders that became common among other populations during interstellar travel's interregnum. On its surface, this is attributable to the nature of the population: everyone knew their several hundred teleporter neighbors could re-establish contact with Earth if it truly became necessary. However, Freedom also enjoys remarkable social cohesion and trust. Credit for this goes to the strong social bonds and flat hierarchy Proxy Atwan encouraged among her order from its earliest days.

Ruan's Worlder society places strong and equal value on personal responsibility and personal freedom. Local governance is by mandatory direct democracy. The age of majority is 16 and passing the civics exam to obtain voting rights is an eagerly anticipated rite of adulthood. While Proxy Atwan leads the order, she doesn't rule Ruan's World. Executive authority rests in the hands of a tightly constrained elected panel consisting of two teleporters, one non-teleporter psion, and two neutral nguzo. With the colonial infrastructure and manufacturing systems owned by the order, the local economy is moneyless, effectively

## RUAN'S WORLD RELATIONS

Non-Upeo psions' reception on Ruan's World depends on their affiliation, mirroring Upeo relations with the other orders. ISRAns are popular because of their traditional partnership with the Upeo and their philosophical acceptance of the teleporters' reasons for vanishing. Æsculapians are also generally welcome, particularly as the two orders are again collaborating on the emergency missions that were one of the reasons for the colony's founding. A request to establish a permanent Æsculapian clinic will soon be up for a colony-wide vote.

Attitudes toward Norça and the Legions are cooler. There's no animosity toward del Fuego's brood, but also little common ground. A poorly phrased 7th Legion offer (or demand, depending on perspective) to augment the colony's defenses was the impetus for the recent ban on large-scale military port calls, leading to some exchanges of words that have left both sides stung and sulky.

Ministry members had best step carefully here. Under the usual mistrust of telepaths lies sullen anger and fear over the Ministry's eagerness to bring the Upeo to heel in 2116. The same sentiments lie naked where ever-meddling Orgotek is concerned. The psi corporation's employees receive a bare minimum of courtesy and many residents consider its products to be shoddy and unreliable.

Ruan's Worlders aren't sure what to make of the Æon Trinity's ever-expanding role in human affairs. They understand idealism, but they're also aware of power's corrupting nature. Still, most citizens are willing to take Æon members at face value until proven wrong.

self-managed socialism. Among economists and sociologists who've studied Freedom, it's an ongoing debate as to whether the system is replicable on a larger scale. Outside the Upeo, the model's most visible supporter is Otha Herzog, who's interested in transplanting Huruf al-Hayy to a sister colony world.

None of this means life on Ruan's World has ever been easy, even with the advantages of cutting-edge technology and the highest psion percentage of any human population. Ruan's Worlders work hard to maintain their comfort and security. While cliques and tribalism do arise, colony leaders strive to channel these impulses into competition, whether formal or informal, that reinforces the overall community rather than fragmenting it.

Over the years of exile, Freedom evolved into more than a colony in Upeo eyes. It's the order's spiritual heart, as much symbol as base or community. Both psion and neutral citizens are fiercely proud and protective of their home. Even those who've left after recontact, whether to rejoin family on Earth or because they disagree with Proxy Atwan's policies, speak fondly of the world — when they speak of it to outsiders at all. Most are cautious of conflict over the hardships the teleporters' absence caused the rest of humanity and prefer to avoid sharing specifics of how relatively comfortable they were. The same defensive impulse led to a recent colonial referendum on outside contact. The results barred the establishment of non-Upeo colonies on the planet, limited visitors to 5% of the current Upeo population, and further banned visits by warships or by any military force larger than 30 troops. Proxy Atwan has advanced a motion to exempt ISRAns from the visitor cap.

# TOUCHSTONES FOR TRAVELERS

While Freedom is small, it does possess a few landmarks worthy of note.

## THE GARDENS

The best physical reflection of overall Ruan's Worlder society is The Gardens, the semicircle of personal spaces along Freedom's sunward edge. They range from literal gardens (both practical and decorative) to performance venues, bars, athletic fields, and reconstructions of terrestrial landmarks. The concept of gardens has become a multifaceted Upeo metaphor. "Tending my garden" refers to self-care or cultivating one's own potential, "The Garden" (singular) is a nickname for Freedom or Ruan's World as a whole, "gardening" is any group leisure activity taking place in The Gardens, and a "gardener" is anyone who puts community ahead of self.

Each citizen receives a tenth-hectare plot upon adulthood or immigration. Larger allocations are available for special projects. Officials are more likely to approve proposals that give back to the community in some way. Almost all the colony's public spaces and establishments originated in this manner.

## CHANZO

While Usio on Earth handles the order's business throughout the solar system, Chanzo (Swahili for "source" or "origin") is its true administrative hub. This modest three-story stone structure is the colonial administrative center. Almost as an afterthought, it also houses the offices of Bolade Atwan and her inner circle.

Several hundred meters beneath the building, Chanzo's hidden half is a collection of artificial caverns containing the order's Prometheus Chamber and other critical assets. It's here that every teleporter activated since 2115 has awakened to the noetic totality. Teleporters without strong attachments to other places frequently adopt this as their "zero point," or the spatial reference from which they describe all other locations. More than one grievously injured teleporter has reflexively returned here with her last breath, leading to the installation of one-way jump rings connecting the Prometheus Chamber's cavern to a dedicated trauma bay in the colony's hospital.

## MANSA QU

The Upeo had no need for orbital infrastructure over Ruan's World until recontact with Earth and subsequent participation in the jump ship program. While development of the Nyangumi- and Karwe-class jump ships is proceeding in the Mars and Titan yards, Proxy Atwan recognized the need for off-earth building slips. When it's complete in 2125, Mansa Qu Station will hang in geosynchronous orbit over Freedom, giving the Upeo their own shipyard.

Initial specifications called for Mansa Qu to be capable of producing only the (relatively) small Karwe design. However, Upeo naval architects are drawing up plans for a separate jump ship class exclusive to the order. The only public information on this design is its name, Bundi. It's uncertain why the Upeo have chosen to name their proposed jump ship type after the owl, a creature so ill-aspected in many African mythologies.

CHAPTER TWO

# NEW WORLDS TO EXPLORE

...my own suspicion is that the Universe is not only stranger than we suppose, but stranger than we can suppose.
— J.B.S. Haldane

This chapter is about exploration. Humanity has just discovered seven of the 10 worlds described in this chapter, and no one from off world has visited any of the other three for more than 70 years. The characters in your campaign can be among the first, or perhaps even the very first individuals to ever set foot on these planets. Chrome Prime is known from interviews with teleporters rescued from Chromatic captivity, interrogation of Chromatic prisoners, and clairsentient observation, but no human has ever explored its surface. The three Nova Era colonies were all previously visited and colonized by humans. However, either people on Earth lost all record of their existence during the Crash, and your characters found them by accident, or someone in one of the psi orders or the Æon Trinity uncovered previously lost or ignored records and dispatched the characters to visit these lost colonies. Humanity knows almost nothing about the six remaining worlds, including one that is home to an intelligent alien species. Based on the characters' actions, these aliens could become valuable allies or dangerous foes for humanity. Some of the other worlds could potentially become the site of new human colonies, while others may yield valuable technologies or other useful information. However, all the worlds in this chapter give the characters in your chronicle the chance to prove themselves as clever and daring explorers.

### THE THRILL OF DISCOVERY

Humanity discovered or rediscovered all of these worlds quite recently. As a result, characters in your campaign can be among the second team of people sent to these worlds to learn more about them. However, if you wish for your characters to have the first thrill of discovery, feel free to rework the details so that your characters are now the first humans to visit these worlds, or in the case of the Nova Era colonies, the first new humans to visit these worlds. The decision is up to you.

# ALMANZIL

Many private interests took pride in contracting novas for various services, and Saudi magnate Aabid el-Hammad was an avid patron of novas for his vanity projects such as Almanzil, the ultimate private resort. But then the novas who opened warps to this world ceased showing up, stranding all the guests and staff, and the resident novas died one by one to a mysterious illness. At that point, the advanced technology that kept the colony going began deteriorating without nova maintenance. Now, the inhabitants barely know how anything works, they worship the mummified corpses of the novas, and they are too young to remember Earth as anything but a legend.

## THE EXCLUSIVE AND THE ELITE

El-Hammad intended his resort to cater to the most exclusive crowd in the world, who could pay for a warp to a distant planet or warp themselves. The top selling points of Almanzil were the spectacular view of a huge, pale sun in the day, and a moon that darted across the horizon twice per night due to its retrograde orbit. Add to that carefully manicured beaches, and all the amenities nova hypertechnology could provide.

The novas who worked on the project set up an energy fence around the grounds to keep out the native plant and insect life and filter out the excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. They equipped the larders with devices that transformed biomass into edible raw materials that the cooks could then prepare, and installed an energy grid that combined hyperfusion, solar, and tidal generators.

The resort's habitat had almost nothing to do with the surrounding environment; it was a bubble of Earth for the rich and bored to enjoy themselves literally light years away from every other human in settled space.

## PLANETARY DATA: ALMANZIL

**Founded:** 2042
**Discovery:** 2035 (Aberrants )
**Rediscovered:** 2122 (Upeo wa Macho)
Distance from Earth: 2,310 light years
**Star:** Mansoor (F8 V)
**Diameter:** 14,500 km
**Gravity:** 1.12 Earth
**Atmosphere:** Oxygen and nitrogen (breathable in the inhabited zone, slowly deadly elsewhere due to excess carbon dioxide)
**Air Pressure:** 0.9 Earth
**Temperature:** –2° C to 35° C
**Percentage Ocean**: 47%
**Rotation Period:** 28 hours
**Native Life:** Low plants and fungi, a wide variety of insectoid species
**Human Population:** 16,000

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Almanzil is slightly larger than Earth and has a longer rotation period; the sky is a pale bluish green as the atmosphere extends further from the surface, and its sun appears much larger in the sky.

The lands and oceans are teeming with flora adapted to the radiation that the planet's relatively weak magnetic field allows through. Evolution proceeds faster on this world due to the increased rate of mutation. Most plant species consist of shrubs of varying thickness and color, dominated by species with leaves the size of an adult's torso, but also with various parasitic vines living off the nutrients of the thicker species. There is a handful of tree-like species, most common in valleys and basins deeper inland.

The land is irregular and varied; mountain ranges crisscross the three continents, contributing to the formation of complex weather patterns, and are rich with minerals, while the oceans have an average depth of around 6,000 feet, with no significant trenches but many shallows.

The water in all bodies of water produces more foam and is "fizzy" thanks to the carbon dioxide released by the underwater plant species and existing in the natural atmosphere of the planet, and the tides shift faster than any on Earth.

Insect-like creatures are the only animal species on Almanzil. They can grow as large as a cow and follow a generally squat physiology, the better to hide among the bushes. Smaller species have a wide variety of shapes, and many are either venomous or poisonous.

## ARTIFICIAL HABITAT

While hospitable to life, unprotected humans would die within hours due carbon dioxide poisoning, if they didn't die first from stings by deadly insects, brushing against a prey species, or inhaling the pollen or spores from some of the deadlier local plants.

El-Hammad spared no expense to wrest a habitable area from the planet, choosing a bay where the ocean was calmer and the climate was tropical. His contracted novas went to work quickly, fencing off an area totaling 850 acres that included the bay, its beaches, a good span of land and part of the nearby mountains, with the intent of offering a wide variety of "extraplanetary adventure tourism" activities. He paid novas to annihilate all the local plants and insects, and replaced them with modified Earth species.

The outer fence is a marvel of nova age technology: a perimeter of 10-foot tall posts spaced evenly that project a sheet of energy that also extends and curves inward to form a large dome. The fencing disrupts the molecular bonds of all native species and catalyzes

the excess carbon dioxide into free oxygen and carbon dust so the air inside the dome is 100% breathable by humans. By El-Hammad's request, the energy dome is less effective undersea, so the water keeps some of its unique composition to provide his guests with an unusual experience of swimming in carbonated water.

A nova architect designed and built the multiple villas and central buildings, using a mix of materials mined locally and imported from Earth. El-Hammad ensured this habitat possessed all the luxuries expected of such a high-class resort. To complete the facilities, he ordered a heliport and a marina, with a capacity for five tilted-wing aircraft and a couple of dozen yachts and speedboats.

## THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Almanzil depended on the three warp-capable novas el-Hammed hired to transports guests, personnel, and supplies back and forth between the colony and Earth, and the resort enjoyed some success, although fewer guests arrived each year as the Aberrant War began. Then, the current residents were unable to leave.

All the warping novas who worked for the resort either went mad from Corruption or fell in battle with other novas. El-Hammed tried fruitlessly to reach another warper to evacuate his extrasolar resort. Now-insane Aberrants killed him during one of his contact attempts. He was the only human on Earth who knew the colony's location, and the Crash destroyed his records.

In Almanzil, business continued as normal for the next month after the first scheduled warp didn't arrive, but alarm began to spread among the guests and staff when six months passed and there was no contact with Earth. The resident novas were mostly builders and overland explorers, incapable of leaving the atmosphere on their own or communicating with Earth. To their credit, these novas kept their composure and did not fall to Corruption but, after one year of isolation, they began to die one by one.

The heavy-handed terraforming had an effect on local life. Quantum Flux was high around the dome posts, and as they explored the land, the novas themselves spread a swath of quantum mutations. The two novas in charge of the fence compensated for these mutations and adjusted the fence to remain effective, but as the project's microbiologist was back on Earth, they missed a vital species to keep out: bacteria.

The first to contract a quantum-mutated bacteria was a nova ranger, who brought it from one of her forays into the colony's surroundings. The bacteria required significant amounts of Quantum Flux to spread and reproduce, and thus it quickly died inside neutrals. The resort's administrators put the novas under unnecessary quarantine, and rounded up all the technicians to assess how bad their situation was without the novas to protect the resort from the environment outside the dome.

The bad news was that not even the senior technicians understood how the nova technology worked, but the good news was that the novas taught them how to maintain the various devices and repair them, and they could have access to unlimited spare parts thanks to the industrial 3D printers the nova builders had brought with them. Food and water were not an issue thanks to the larders' biomass converters and filters, but medicines were almost gone, and residents used the last roll of toilet paper the week before, and other toiletries were on the same path to depletion. And the guests were getting seriously angry.

### QUANTUM LEPROSY

The disease that killed Almanzil's novas resembles leprosy: it begins with skin lesions and muscular weakness, until it paralyzes the nova. Then it desiccates and pulverizes all of the novas' soft tissues and eventually transforms their skin into a calcified crust and halts their respiration. The novas with survival-oriented powers lasted a few more weeks than their fellows, but they too eventually fell, leaving behind calciferous mummies with skeletal features.

Noetic surveys can detect that the nova corpses are still active with Quantum Flux, but as the Æsculapians declared a planet-wide quarantine, it remains unknown whether the activity is due to the bacteria lying dormant, or if the novas are still somehow alive and probably in terrible agony.

## THE 1 AND THE 99

The lack of news and explanations from the staff began to irritate the assorted millionaires, politicians, scions of large fortunes, and the rest of the overprivileged clientele that could afford the trip and the stay.

The administrators were able to hide that the novas were sick for a while, but as the protectors began to fall one by one, the guests found out, and their exasperation turned to fear, which turned into sustained abuse inflicted on the staff who were still working to keep everything running.

During one of the dinners the administrators organized to maintain morale, a guest struck a waiter on the head with a metal pitcher, killing him almost instantly. This released the outrage the workers had been keeping a lid on, and the entire body of waiters and kitchen staff launched a wave of violence against the people they had formerly served. Neither the present bodyguards nor the security personnel intervened, as they too were tired of their treatment.

After the night of rage, the staff had killed nearly a third of the guests. The administrators did not protest when the head of security took over leadership and declared that Almanzil was now a self-sufficient, autonomous colony. Cut off from their power, wealth, and influence, the head of security put the guests to work, just like everybody else.

## A NEW SOCIETY

Upeo wa Macho clairsentients found Almanzil in 2122, but past experiences with other lost colonies made them approach with caution and teleport an exploration frigate in orbit rather than appearing on the surface. The quantum fence that protects the colony distorts clairsentience, so they made most observation using drones.

Probes confirmed the atmosphere outside the dome continues to be poisonous, and first observations of the Almanzilans was a three-person gathering party dressed in very thick clothing and wearing filter masks. They gathered as much plant matter as they could from the immediate surroundings outside the fence and returned within an hour.

Smaller spy drones were able to cross the barrier and remain undetected. While electronic feeds passed through the dome without problem, noetic links were hard to maintain and only conveyed garbled impressions of the residents' health and state of mind.

The contact expedition found a society with no person over 50 years old. The people wear clothing cobbled together from drapery and plastic and follow different daily routines. Although on the surface people seemed to know what they were doing when working on the former resort's machinery, they did so while chanting rhyming directions on what to do, which suggested they had learned the maintenance checklists and routines by rote rather than by understanding what they are doing.

The colored patches all residents wear on the left side of their coats and shirts point to a division of labor or specialties, which further observation revealed to be more like castes or trade guilds, each living on one of the villas in the complex or a handful of floors in the hotel building. The inhabitants expanded the villas with lean-tos, tents, and other structures built with 3D-printed materials, or by tearing down some walls in the hotel.

The drones eventually found the 3D printers and the top floors of the hotel buildings that the inhabitants had cannibalized to for raw materials, and later the biomass converters that continue to provide food for the colony.

The hyperfusion generator is no longer working, half the tidal turbines failed, and the solar panels show evidence of jury-rigging. Power is now out in most of the complex. The only exceptions are the kitchens, larders, and refrigerators, as well as the workshops and outdoor lighting. And of course, the fence, which is by far the greatest drain on the failing power grid.

The colony now survives through guild-like sub-societies the locals call "departments," which live apart but come together every night for communal dinners in the resort's central garden.

## WORRYING DEVELOPMENTS

Eventually, the drones discovered the Aberrant corpses. Preserved in their calcified state, the inhabitants enshrined each nova in one of their villas. The reverence and prayers they receive indicates that each Aberrant is somehow related to the trade practiced by the department that safeguards the corpse.

A biodrone took a tissue sample from one of the Aberrants, which allowed the Upeo observers to discover the quantum leprosy bacteria, but more importantly, that the bacteria were not dead, just dormant. The quantum-powered germs woke up inside the drone and infected its biological components,

focusing on the subquantum circuitry, until the drone just ceased operations. The orbital vessel sent another biodrone to retrieve it to prevent discovery by the locals, but it also contracted the bacteria and dropped in the jungle outside the dome.

The last readings the first drone relayed also showed low quantum activity under the calcified crust, along with signs that might indicate the corpse was actually a living organism in stasis, but the data was too corrupted to be certain. Another concerning issue about Almanzil was how the colony managed to survive in such a reduced living space. The drones witnessed a ceremony where the inhabitants injected two individuals, probably around their forties, with a poison obtained from one of the local insects. They seemed to die peacefully, and then their fellows carried them to the biomass converters.

The Upeo used the drones to investigate further, and found the colony kept its population small and manageable on purpose by sacrificing the elders to the biomass converters, in the name of their dead protectors.

## A GENERATION IN THE DARK

The inhabitants keep the colony's population young by both necessity and choice. An "elder" has the obligation to pass down all the secrets of their trade, which now consists half of actual science and half memorized routines, especially when it comes to nova technology. And when the elder has nothing more to teach and reaches the age of 50, they volunteer for sacrifice so a young couple earns the right to bear a child. Inhabitants who develop Quantum Flux diseases or other serious health problems also sacrifice themselves when they become too incapacitated to perform any useful duties.

Upon reaching puberty, Almanzil children must decide on a trade they will follow, and move out of their parents' home to the villa assigned to the chosen guild. While children usually follow their parents' trade, it's not mandatory.

The departments the observers have identified so far, with the color of their patches and the banners in their villa, include the Electricians (blue), the Gatherers (brown), the Farmers (green), the Housekeepers (white), the Organizers (yellow, usually a single family), the Protectors (black), and the Mechanics (gray). Each department chooses a leader, and the leaders choose a "manager" between their number, who serves until their turn arrives to surrender their body as biomass.

The heliports and marina are functional, but there is only a handful of aircraft and seacraft on each, with the rest of them already used as materials for the 3D printers. The remaining vehicles are unused, as the last of the Pilots died a decade earlier, crashing a helicopter on the other side of the mountains.

The population shows a wide array of ethnicities and mixed heritages, but dominant features come from Middle East and Northern Africa. The stories told during the communal dinners under dim electrical light are in an Arabic peppered with many expressions from other languages, including English and some German.

The Earth that the Almanzilans speak about sounds more like a fabled utopia than an actual world, with just brief mentions of demons who started a war on humanity, but also tell how Those Who Are Trusted brought their people here to Almanzil to save them, then went to sleep. Now Those Who Are Trusted wait in eternal vigilance for the Earth to be safe again, so they can take home all the Almanzilans who work hard and are ready to give it all for the colony.

## PLANS FOR RECONTACT

Due to the quantum leprosy bacteria, Almanzil is currently under quarantine, and the Upeo shared the existence of the bacteria and the colony itself only to the Æon Trinity and the other psi orders. Using the bacteria as a weapon against the Aberrants is tempting, but its potential to affect psions and Talents is too great to risk contagion. Also, there is something happening inside the Aberrant husks.

Æon is trying to devise a recontact plan to extract the humans from the colony, along with a reeducation and acclimatization program to help them cope with the fact that the legends of humanity's homeworld are real, and that they can return home, even if it's not quite the home their tales describe.

# BAAMBEE

This planet is a beacon of life to noetic perception. ISRA astronomer Fateena al-Dawood found the second planet around a small hot star, by the near end of the star's habitable zone, because it was a magnet to her drifting senses. The planet was quite young, and there was little or no life on land, but its oceans lit up all the clairsentient's senses. She flagged her find as a potentially viable colony world, but there was no follow-up because the teleporters vanished two weeks later. It was not until 2123 that Æon funded an exploratory mission with the returned Upeo, and confirmed the planet had a rich marine ecosystem, and that the surface was perfectly habitable. The largest concentrations of life exist in a vast network of lava tubes of varying depths, with the different chemical compositions around hydrothermal vents and the myriad oceanic regions supporting an incredibly biodiverse ecosystem. Al-Dawood christened the planet after the first word that came into her head after waking up from her trance: "anthill."

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Baambee is an oceanic world with less than a fifth of its surface covered with land, composed of small islands spread across the planet. The oceans' depths vary wildly, with shallow seas hundreds of kilometers across dropping abruptly into trenches of moderate depth. Exposed lava tubes crisscross the ocean floor and trench walls. These tubes redirect water currents like underwater "rivers," while also exposing minerals from the depths of the planet's crust that remain trapped in the tube, giving its enclosed currents a different chemical composition than their surroundings.

The exposed tubes connect to the planet's most characteristic feature: its underwater cavern systems created by ancient lava flows. A few of these caves open to the surface in islands whose only feature is the sinkholes that lead to the local tube network; others have openings to the sea floor above them, nearly half cross the underwater mountain ranges, and a vast underground network lie beyond sensor range where water pressure defies exploration attempts.

Medium levels of methane in the atmosphere create a greenhouse effect that warms the surface. Surface radiation is well within Earth standards and the air is breathable, with few airborne microorganisms. The methane is not enough to make the atmosphere dangerous except in the upper layers, where the perfect concentration mix of oxygen and methane ignites during storms, giving lightning a fireworks side show. The expedition scientists jokingly refer to this region as the "explodeysphere" or, when feeling more serious, the pyrosphere.

The nights are temperate and dark, as the planet has no moon. The oceans become pitch black even on the open sea, lit only by the bioluminescent fungi that covers some of the local fauna and the walls of many flooded lava tubes.

### PLANETARY DATA: BAAMBEE

**Discovery:** 2116 (ISRA/Upeo wa Macho)
**Distance from Earth:** 685 light years
**Star:** SS816 — G0
**Diameter:** 10,322 km
**Gravity:** 0.85 Earth
**Atmosphere:** Oxygen, nitrogen, and methane
**Air Pressure:** 1.2 Earth
**Temperature:** –1° C to 52° C
**Percentage Ocean:** 82%
**Rotation Period:** 20 hours
**Native Life:** Marine megaflora, coral equivalents, marine gestalt organisms

## THE NOETIC SONG

The planet has psionically active organisms hiding in the lava tubes that produce a faint psionic background noise which every psion, since the expedition's arrival, is able to "hear."

Clairsentients report hearing a song every now and then, and one navigator describes it as the feeling of talking with a Leviathan jump ship. Æon is conducting further observations before deciding whether to bring a Leviathan to orbit to see if it can communicate with the local psionic organisms. The main impediment currently is deciding whether such contact is safe.

## THE SAMASHTI

The oceans are full of animal life, but every single specimen is actually a small community of a handful of other species working together as a unit. Nicknamed "samashti," these animals come in an extremely wide variety of shapes and functions. The expedition's exobiologists have been careful when collecting samples from the samashti, as the more accessible varieties are fragile, and the sturdier ones can be dangerous. The analyses are yielding more questions than answers, and further observation and scans employ probes and marine camera drones, to give behavioral context to the studies' findings.

In general, samashti consist of a fungal bed that handles the animal's digestion and provides energy to the rest of the gestalt components. Clinging to this bed, tiny specimens of a coral-like species grow shells which mesh together to create an exoskeleton container, while others remain shell-less and behave like cilia, to provide propulsion and rudimentary muscles and ligaments. Before this shell closes, a medusozoan specimen crawls inside and sinks many tendrils into the fungal bed, which then grow like a tree's roots and become the samashti's nervous system and sensory organs. The exoskeletal shells grow in simple geometric shapes in the waters near the surface, but in greater depths, the samashti become more complex and the shells may grow in different shapes or form networks of overlapping plates that cover the segments of the largest of the gestalt creatures.

Some gestalts add more colony species to fulfill various functions, like a different medusozoa that leaves some tendrils outside the shell and thickens them to provide working "arms" that lick minerals and lichens off the rocks, or insectoid species that join the organism to provide even more specialized "organs," like stingers, pincers, venom glands, etc.

The colony species grow from nests, spawning pools, and rocky surfaces across the ocean floor and the walls of lava tubes. The mechanisms by which the member species join together are varied. The impulse to join a samashti appears to be noetic in nature, as a spawn of corals hatches just in time to join a fungal bed that detached from the rocks, and a free medusozoa drifts by not a few days later.

Biokinetics have a great deal of interest in the mechanisms by which the organisms change and grow into their purpose once they join the samashti, because the same component species can become different pseudo-organs in different collective organisms.

Most samashti varieties grow no larger than a couple of feet in length, but observers spotted one colossal specimen in the open ocean, a mobile coral reef at least one kilometer in length and 50 meters in diameter.

By the end of the samashti's life, its client components lay eggs in the fungal bed, which completely deplete its nutrients over time. The samashti then begins a tour of its environment, dropping the eggs in ideal locations for new or existing spawning pools, until at last it falls apart. Some of the component specimens die, but others become free and may join a different gestalt later.

## THE SURFACE WORLD

While Baambee's oceans hold the deepest mysteries and richer ecosystems, its surface makes it a viable colony world. The air is breathable, but the slightly higher pressure may cause mild discomfort before a person acclimates. Few lichen species grow on land, and those that do only grow around sinkholes that lead to the underwater lava tubes. These microorganisms are not compatible with terrestrial biology, though some can cause allergic reactions that can, in rare cases, be life threatening.

Most of the islands that dot the oceanic landscape are pure volcanic rock, but the northern hemisphere has 11 larger, older islands covered in soils rich in

## EYE ISLAND

One of the largest islands on the planet is perfect for colonization. Shaped like a crescent, it has also the highest mountains on the surface, with a maximum altitude of around 850 meters above sea level, and the semicircular range protects the inner stretch of land and the bay from the storms.

The land itself is 460 kilometers in width at the thickest part of the crescent, tapering down on both directions to 200 and 300 meters at the ends, surrounding a roughly circular bay with a diameter of 900 kilometers. Explorers named it because the waters within the bay are shallow, with a depth of less than 350 meters except at its center, where an extinct volcanic shaft sinks deep into the planet, creating a black spot at the center of the otherwise clear waters.

minerals that would be fertile ground for many Earth plant species. Precipitation is pervasive across the planet's surface, but is more frequent in the northern tropics, where the frequent rains created an assortment of pluvial lakes and wetlands ideal for irrigation. Rain and lake water are slightly alkaline but not harmful, although biochemists have recommended that any colonies use standard water filters.

The only real problem with the surface is the weather. With very little land to break air currents, storms and hurricanes are common, especially in the late summer. The temperature range of the planet is higher and narrower than Earth's, so the storms tend not to be as intense as pressure systems do not vary as much, but they still present a challenge to any construction project or surface travel. Lightning from these storms can ignite the oxygen-methane mix in the upper atmosphere; the fireballs disrupt meteorological readings and pose a risk for high-flying aircraft.

## THE COASTAL FORESTS

The first close scans of the planet changed the initial estimates about the ocean percentage, as orbital spectrography and later drones revealed that large tracts of what surveyors believed to be land were actually underwater forests of gigantic species resembling lily pads, with floating leaves that spanned between 15 to 120 meters in diameter.

These coastal forests grow around the islands in the equatorial belt and the southern hemisphere. The surface leaves grow only slightly apart, and are thick enough to support a small terrestrial vehicle. The stems sink down into the ocean floor, thick as an old sequoia's trunk and just as strong, able to resist the choppy waters of the frequent storms.

The titanic trunks serve as nesting grounds for a few varieties of the fungal foundations for the samashti, and a few samashti varieties feed on the thick leaves on the surface. Wait a few million years and one or more varieties of samashti might evolve an air-breathing physiology to create an amphibian gestalt.

Studying the internal structure of the stems already inspired one of the biokinetics in the expedition to design stronger biotech support beams for buildings and bioships, and one of the ideas floating among the team is that the stems could provide a very sturdy structure for underwater outposts drilled around the stem's core, possibly even an elevator system to the ocean floor.

## THE CONTINENTAL SEAS

Æon explorers identified the various continental shelves that extend under the archipelagos. With a habitat several hundreds of kilometers in width, the liveliest and most colorful of the samashti varieties populate these waters. The coral reefs charted by the exploration drones are actually a sedentary samashti species, which forms a shell first and a protozoan colony species slowly builds the fungal bed. The reef is complete when a medusozoa enters the shell and turns its tendrils into roots that slowly bore into the ocean floor to secure the new structure in place.

The reefs' growth is kept in check by a predatory samashti variety which grows extremely strong pincers that crack through the sedentary species' shell so that its cilia can steal the fungal bed for its own, providing nourishment. Biologists theorize the prey's fungal bed also provides new genetic material for the predator, which may pass it on when the colony species' eggs grow in the fungal bed.

Most of the samashti varieties in the continental seas are no larger than a medium sized dog and their fungal beds metabolize methane more efficiently than oxygen.

The ocean floor in the continental waters, which includes the coastal forests, has a shallow topsoil,

providing easy access to the underlying bedrock. This means the roots of the water lilies in the coastal forests and the medusozoa that anchor the coral reefs are either much stronger than believed, or they use a non-kinetic method to drill into the rock.

## THE PELAGIC ZONE

Away from the continental shelves, Baambee's oceans grow even stranger. While many samashti inhabit the waters close to the surface, the lower depths are home to a variety of regions with different chemical compositions where several species have adapted and evolved along divergent lines.

The fauna grows larger and more complex the deeper their habitat is, integrating even more colony species into their gestalts. The expedition's probes cannot withstand the pressure in the deeper regions of the sea, but clairsentience and biokinetic scans reveals that there is a wealth of life down there. In the pelagic zone, hydrothermal vents riddle the ocean floor. These vents release methane into the water and then the atmosphere and, with their different chemical compositions, each vent creates a unique ecosystem around it.

## THE LAVA TUNNELS

Baambee is like a Russian doll: the deeper the explorers have scanned or probed, the more biological wealth they find. A wide network of lava tubes crosses the planet under the continental shelves and the mountains and floor in the open ocean. There are few active volcanoes on the planet, but it's clear the formation of this world was explosive.

The lava tubes are the home of the widest variety of plants, fungi, and lichens, along with a greater variety of colony species for the samashti, which then reflects in the diversity of the gestalt creatures themselves. These variants are more resilient than their open-water counterparts, and, more importantly, more noetically active.

The medusozoa species have a stronger noetic presence, but it does not reach anything resembling sentience; to a psion's senses, they are just exceedingly noetically obvious. The expedition geologists classified the lava tunnels according to their depth relative to the ocean surface and the ocean floor. The tubes that cross the continental shelves are called "corridors" that form "networks," while those that were formed under the ocean floor, as well as the continental tubes that are at the same depth under the bottom are "passages" that form "labyrinths."

## THE HADOPELAGIC HEART

In the deepest cave of each labyrinth, a colossal medusozoa exists without other colony species, but with smaller medusozoa connected in a mesh that unnervingly resembles a neuronal network. These medusozoa are fully psionic, with very strong telepathic and biokinetic modes. Alone, each megamedusozoa has the same intelligence as others of its kind, but linked with the smaller specimens, they have a primitive intelligence that is not yet sapient. Since the arrival of the Æon mission, the megamedusozoa connected with each other to hide from the human psions' perceptions, casting a cloak around their species.

The crushing depths where they live and the difficulty of navigating the labyrinths make it unlikely that humans will find them physically any time soon. However, if psions start probing deeper and more insistently, the medusozoa may react with all the biological ingenuity of the samashti and, expanding its network both physically and psionically, perhaps growing into a colossal gestalt spread across the entire ocean floor.

### NETWORKS

The shallower corridors have enough vents to the open waters that they exchange currents, and there is little risk of getting lost. Bubbles are a common sight as air and gas pockets deeper in the network release their contents, providing a clear path to the nearest exit. Fungal colonies grow thick in the ceiling of corridor, catching oxygen from passing bubbles and using them to spread their spores. Most of these fungi are simple organisms that never form fungal beds for samashti.

The food chain in a corridor is savage and evolving continuously, as the samashti "try" new configurations of colony species. Predator gestalts as large as horses and shaped like sharks destroyed three drones before the scientists marked that network as off-limits. Prey varieties develop creative defenses like ablative, layered shells, poisonous cilia, water jet propulsion, and even sliding scales that reconfigure into different shapes.

The water in corridors is also rich with minerals, and this led to the discovery of ore veins in corridor walls deeper in their network. Unfortunately, this ore interferes with electronic signals, so only biotech drones controlled telepathically can go into the deeper parts of a network, and into the labyrinths.

### LABYRINTHS

Only one biotech drone managed to enter a labyrinth, and only lasted three hours before succumbing to the pressure. The readings the drone conveyed showed even stranger configurations of samashti, far more hydrothermal vents than at shallower depths, and passages covered wall to wall with bioluminescent fungi.

Colony species in the labyrinths are sturdier than even the fully shelled gestalts in the networks, able to withstand the searing heat from the larger and more numerous vents, and toxic waters created by gasses released from the volcanic depths. However, the predator vs. prey arms race in the labyrinths' food chains is far less intense. Instead, the local samashti form symbiotic relationships with each other, creating a fractal chain of dependency where colony species change to better cooperate with the colony species in other gestalts in addition to the other organisms in their own samashti.

However, the most enigmatic discovery in the labyrinth was a cave crossed with giant crystals through which the drone couldn't fit. The last signal the drone sent was a sudden spike in electrical activity in the crystal cave, followed by what the operator described as a "telepathic growl," before the drone's chitinous case collapsed. The collected readings suggest there may be more such caves in the labyrinths.

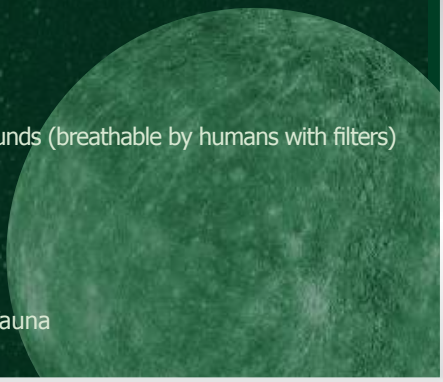
# CHROME PRIME

Home to one of humanity's most baffling and persistent foes, Chrome Prime is a dry, landlocked world. From orbit, Chrome Prime appears much like an Earth-sized Mars, a ball of reddish-brown ochre against the blackness of space. Geologically, Chrome Prime is considerably younger than Earth and prone to frequent volcanic activity that reshapes the surface and spews toxic gases into the atmosphere. Chrome Prime's thin atmosphere can accommodate humans, but these sulfurous volcanic plumes require the aid of filters to scrub out the toxins.

The thin atmosphere contains almost no ozone and does little to block harsh radiation from Chrome

## PLANETARY DATA: CHROME PRIME

**Discovery:** 2084 (Aberrants)
**Rediscovered:** 2123 (Æon Trinity)
**Distance from Earth:** 86,000 light years
**Star:** CSGC 4:5112:35:21 — F9
**Diameter:** 11,300 km
**Gravity:** 0.88 Earth
**Atmosphere:** Oxygen, nitrogen, some sulfur compounds (breathable by humans with filters)
**Air Pressure:** 0.75 Earth
**Temperature:** –50° C to 50° C
**Percentage Ocean:** 45%
**Rotation Period:** 26 hours
**Native Life:** Chromatics, various other flora and fauna



Prime's sun, bathing the planet with far more harmful ultraviolet radiation than Earth. Surface air pressure is akin to Earth's high mountain ranges, leaving anyone unfamiliar with such conditions feeling like they're constantly struggling for breath and rapidly fatigued. The lack of surface vegetation and water means Chrome Prime's exterior experiences desert temperature extremes. By day the air boils and the dry dirt bakes anything on its surface, but as soon as the sun disappears over the horizon the temperature plummets to below freezing.

A loose ring of asteroid-like debris orbits the planet approximately 15 degrees off the equatorial plane, remnants of a moon destroyed by some unknown, ancient cataclysmic event. Because the inner portions of the ring are so close to Chrome Prime, fragments frequently suffer orbital decay, falling to the planet's surface in fiery balls of burning rock, their impacts throwing up clouds of dirt that darken the sky and provide brief respite from solar radiation.

The ring's stable orbit means these rocks usually impact a predictable band across Chrome Prime, mostly sparing the rest of the planet's surface. This doesn't leave it entirely unscathed as the rockfalls drive geothermal and volcanic activity across the planet's crust and interior. Chromatics and other indigenous creatures are well-versed in dangers from the skies and don't dwell near the impact band, but nowhere on the surface is entirely immune to danger.

Chrome Prime isn't without water, but most of it is deep underground in large subterranean seas and tunnel-like river systems. The planet's geothermal activity

## ENDURING THE SURFACE

Survival on Chrome Prime's surface isn't easy for humans. The thin air brings on rapid fatigue, with all physical activities without breathing apparatus suffering +2 Complication — failure to buy off the Complication inflicts the Stunned Status Condition (**Trinity Continuum Corebook**, p. 108) until the character gains considerable rest. Characters also experience the effects of extreme heat and cold (**Trinity Continuum Corebook**, p. 111) during the day and night, respectively, and must ensure they drink sufficient water each day, or they'll begin to suffer Injury Conditions as their bodies suffer from dehydration. The right precautions and survival equipment can mitigate or eliminate these risks, as can appropriate psi powers. In addition, the sulfurous atmosphere is a slow poison to anyone not wearing a filter mask or similar protections. Anyone who breathes the unfiltered atmosphere on the surface suffers environmental damage with a damage rating of 1, with both the Continuous (hour), and Deadly tags.

— the molten core below and asteroid impacts above — warms this deep water table. The tectonic activity forces the subterranean seas to swell or recede, carving tunnels and aqueducts through softer rock. These water flows carved a vast array of small caves and caverns linked by a labyrinthine tunnel network. These factors gave rise to a humid, temperate, and protected environment beneath the planet's surface, and provided favorable conditions for a rich ecosystem to develop almost entirely hidden away from outside observers.

## SURFACE SURVIVAL AND SUBTERRANEAN CIVILIZATION

Chrome Prime's surface isn't entirely devoid of life. Some exceedingly hardy plants and well-adapted animals call the inhospitable surface their home. Even these usually keep to sheltered crevices between the peaks, or valley scars left from asteroid bombardment. Some of these creatures resemble Earth-like desert animals — particularly insects and reptiles —while others are unlike anything humans have experienced.

In stark contrast to the barren and deadly surface, Chrome Prime's subterranean world is a vibrant life-filled environment. Most of this life exists in the near-surface levels, where harsh daylight filters through rocky crystals to provide a soft glow to the tunnels, and evaporation from the buried seas brings a warm humidity. This provides perfect conditions for plants, fungi, and microorganisms to flourish and produce oxygen that higher-order life depends on for survival. The alien vegetation takes sulfurous compounds from the atmosphere to grow, making the subsurface air richer and easier to breathe. Below ground, the air is even pure enough for humans to breathe unfiltered for a short time.

The Chromatics prefer to live in the near-surface levels, concentrating their population centers along the shores of the largest equatorial underground seas. This gives easy access to their fish-like preferred food source, and to the water itself for recreation and pleasure. The caverns around the seas are lush with faintly glowing mosses and plants that resemble Earth ferns and thick hedges. Chromatics tend and shape these to indicate tribe and dynasty ownership, and as coded markers for tribal members to find resources and food. Many caverns are also home

## DIGGERBEE SWARM DAMAGE

| THREAT | DAMAGE RATING | TAGS | THREAT TYPE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Diggerbee | 1 | Continuous (minute), Deadly | Environmental |

to clusters of glowworms that feed on the plants and leave delicate structures of a high silicate, silk-like material that resonates with certain wavelengths of light, shimmering in complicated, kaleidoscopic patterns that Chromatics enjoy. Chromatics often raise their own glowworm colonies within their sleeping places, in a way that is simultaneously akin to keeping pets and providing personalized decoration.

# FLORA AND FAUNA

The creatures here are a small sample of Chrome Prime's rich ecosystem from above and below the surface. Notably, Chrome Prime has nothing resembling mammalian life. Every animal has evolved a metabolism like Earth's cold-blooded creatures, and no species gives birth to live young, relying on oviparous reproduction. This heat-reliant metabolism rarely slows Chrome Prime's creatures, many of which have developed ways of maintaining their thermal energy for as long as possible — including through the evolution of low-level psi abilities.

## DIGGERBEE

This surface-dwelling, wasp-like insect is four centimeters long with an iridescently metallic carapace from a high concentration of bioaccumulated metals. Its serrated mandibles are adept at grinding through rock where the diggerbees make their hives and secrete a sticky, amber-resin with a bittersweet taste. This "honey" is edible by humans but contains high heavy metal levels that eventually cause metabolic diseases. Chromatics suffer no such issues and consider diggerbee honey a delicacy. When disturbed, diggerbees swarm their attacker, biting at the prey to burrow deeply into its flesh to feed on its meat and fluids. Once inside a victim, diggerbees release hundreds of pre-fertilized eggs that incubate for about a week before hatching and causing tremendous damage as they consume huge amounts of flesh in their quest to grow and burrow out of the host. Area effect weapons and powers work well against these creatures, and the Chromatics calm them with strobing, colorful light displays when harvesting their honey.

## DREAMWATERS

This small plant is uniquely adapted to the Chrome Prime environment and grows in one of two dissimilar forms depending on where it takes root. On the surface world it becomes a patch of 15-20 dark green cacti with a deep and expansive root network that hoards whatever moisture it can find. Underground, dreamwaters grow thin vines and extend broad, blue-and-green fernlike fronds to capture moisture from the humid air. Dreamwaters flesh is edible and can provide desperately needed moisture on the surface world. Dreamwaters also contains an alkaloid that affects brain activity. Chromatics experience a euphoric and soporific effect with vivid light displays before falling into a deep sleep and traditionally use the plant for medicinal purposes and relaxation, doubling their rates of healing while under its effects. Duration: 8 hours, Maximum Dosage: Three, After-effects: The drowsiness from the deep sleep imposes +1 Difficulty to rolls for four hours after the Chromatic wakes.

Humans instead feel highly alert for a short period, gaining 1 Enhancement to any rolls requiring concentration or focus. Duration: 30 minutes, Maximum Dosage: Two, After-effects: The individual succumbs to vivid hallucinations and paranoia for 12 hours. This acts as the Phobia Status Condition (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 245) against her colleagues during this period.

## GIANT MANTA

Graceful, sleek, and huge, the giant mantas prowl the largest and deepest subterranean seas, gliding through the water in search of prey. Giant manta skins dance with a constant light display that warns of their presence but dazzles and attracts food to them. This light filters through the water, providing entertainment and delight to Chromatic communities when they come near. The Chromatics and mantas appear to have a mutual admiration and affection for each other, and swarms of Chromatics often swim out to the mantas when they come close enough to shore, upon which the two species dance around each other and play with intricate illuminated performances. Mantas frequently allow Chromatics to cling onto their fins and take their passengers deep into the blackness of the sea. It's a testament to the trust the Chromatics place in the mantas that they willingly face their fears of the darkness and accompany the creatures, and little wonder that the

Chromatics based their mothership shape on a companion that brings them comfort against the void.

## MILLISERPENTS

These land and water dwellers resemble terrestrial snakes but have hundreds of short, claw-like legs along each side of their bodies. They move in a serpentine fashion along all but the most polished surfaces, climbing sheer walls or across ceilings with their legs hooking into tiny crevices for purchase. Most commonly found below ground, milliserpents prefer to hunt by dropping on their prey and delivering venom through stingers on their feet, before retreating and stealthily following the victim until it dies. Milliserpents don't eat their prey whole like Earth snakes but tear off chunks of flesh like lizards. If undetected, a milliserpent attacks with 8 dice — if it successfully inflicts damage, it automatically injects venom equivalent to Cobra Venom (**Trinity Continuum Corebook**, p. 111).

## SIFTERS

Huge and alien, sifters — also known as sand eaters — are brown, egg-shaped creatures nearly eight meters tall and six meters in diameter at their base. Dozens of sphincters dot the sifter's upper half, and four thick, short legs extend equidistant around the base of the sand eater, which move it at a tortoise-like speed. As the sifter travels it occasionally pauses to squat and lower the large, iris-like mouth on its ventral surface to the ground where it chews down meters into the dirt, rock, and sand. Its digestive tract sifts and separates useful minerals, water, and organic nutrients from the soil and moves the waste to the sphincters where it releases balls of waste comprised of sand and rock glued together with a sticky biological resin. The sifter keeps a reserve of these sticky feces in special chambers near every sphincter, and if threatened fires dozens of the heavy, clinging projectiles at the offender. These attacks quickly coat victims in the sticky, heavy mass, immobilizing them and leaving them at the mercy of Chrome Prime's hostile environment.

Sifters live in small herds of up to a dozen individuals and favor shady gullies where underground water is closer to the surface. Sifters have a strange, possibly symbiotic, relationship with diggerbees. The insects sometimes burrow into sifters to lay eggs and hatch a new generation of diggerbees. This doesn't appear to harm the sifters who can host generational swarms of diggerbees, but what the sifters gain from the relationship is unknown.

### SIFTER (MODERATE THREAT)

**Primary Pool: 8** (firing projectiles when threatened)

**Secondary Pool:** 6 (noticing threats)

**Desperation Pool:** 4

**Defense:** 4

**Health:** 5

**Edges:** Hardy 3

**Natural Armor:** Complete 3, Hard 1, Soft 2 armor

**SPECIAL ABILITIES**

- **Digestive Projectiles:** Sifters fire heavy, clinging projectiles with the Entangle, Non-Lethal, Ranged (Close-Medium), Silent, Spread, and Weighted tags.

## STUNFISH

Sleek and silver, looking somewhat like Earth pike but with a pair of short tentacles on their sides, stunfish are a favored meal for Chromatics. Part of their appeal is the challenge of catching them. When hunting, stunfish capture their prey by projecting targeted electrical shocks before grasping it while it's stunned. When threatened, stunfish extend their tentacles and deliver a massive electrical shock into the surrounding water. A stunfish hunting strike is unlikely to do more than momentarily shock a Chromatic or human-sized character.

### STUNFISH (MEDIUM THREAT)

**Primary Pool: 7** (stun attacks and swift movement)

**Secondary Pool:** 5 (evading predators and stealth)

**Desperation Pool:** 3

**Defense:** 4

**Health:** 5

**Edges:** Swift (swimming only)

**SPECIAL ABILITIES**

- **Electrical Attack:** Stunfish attacks possess the Electrical, Non-Lethal, Quality 3, and Ranged (short) tags.

## THE SERAPHIM

Nearly 40 years ago, a group of almost 100 Aberrants calling themselves the Seraphim invaded Chrome Prime. Initially pretending to have peaceful intentions, they quickly revealed their true colors and attempted to conquer the Chromatics. Despite suffering horrifying losses, the Chromatics' coordinated photokinetic counter-assaults managed to repel the Seraphim, killing almost half of them, including all the Aberrants capable of warping the group off world. Now trapped on a hostile world, the Seraphim engage in low-level skirmishes with the Chromatics but avoid them — and the deadly howlers — whenever possible.

The Chromatics' sudden ascension as a star-faring power drew the Aberrants' attention. They've tried seizing Chromatic bioships to escape this planet but their Corruption-fueled bodies are antithetical to the psi-based biotechnology, all of which refuse to operate for the Seraphim and quickly die. The Aberrants have stopped trying to steal bioships because of the casualties the Chromatics inflicted during these raids. The arrival of humans, or other beings with hardtech vessels could dramatically change the Seraphim's predicament.

### TANGLEWEED

This carnivorous plant prefers to grow close to the surface but out of direct sunlight. Narrow crevices, holes, and tunnels leading to the near-surface environment are its favored hunting grounds. The plant's core is only around two to four centimeters across, but it grows an extensive network of strong root filaments that penetrate the smallest gaps in the rocks and firmly anchor it to the surface. Tangleweed grows a vast web of tendrils, the only limit on their growth is the available space. Tendrils rarely grow more than a few centimeters in small crevices, whereas a single tangleweed in a large tunnel may have tendrils up to two or three meters long. Tangleweeds range from Size medium to Size 3, depending on available space. When a creature brushes against tangleweed tendrils, the plant quickly tries to envelop and suffocate it, attacking with 7 dice and the Entangle tag. Tangleweeds either gain Enhancement equal to the difference between their Size and the victim (if larger), or suffer increased Difficulty (if smaller). A tangleweed attacks each round that the victim is within its range until it gains sufficient successes to purchase the Paralyzed Stunt (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 275). Afterwards, the tangleweed continues to attack to purchase the Inflict Damage Stunt until its victim suffocates, after which the plant absorbs nutrients as the victim's flesh decays.

## HOWLERS

Among Chrome Prime's various creatures, the beings known as howlers deserve special mention. Chromatic parents tell their offspring cautionary tales of creatures of anti-light who steal disobedient and rebellious children from their nests to devour them in the darkness. While adults use these stories to scare young Chromatics into following their elders' wisdom, they're not fanciful untruths. The creatures of darkness do exist.

Chromatics and howlers shared a common evolutionary ancestor tens of thousands of years ago, when a moon still hung in the night sky. The astronomical event that shattered the moon and poured tons of molten rock upon Chrome Prime's surface caused the massive geological upheaval that sent one species down two divergent pathways. The destruction drastically shifted the subterranean environment. Existing caverns and tunnels collapsed; other areas opened under the shifting rock. Water courses and underground seas drained away from previously safe locations while other sections flooded, drowning everything in their path.

When the chaos abated, the fortunate survivors moved to stable near-surface areas with plentiful access to the new seas and waterways. They continued their near-amphibious evolution and became the Chromatics. Broken rock and now impenetrable tunnels cut the unfortunates off from their underground seas. These creatures adapted to the darkness and limited water by becoming more reptilian. They survived. They became the howlers.

Neither evolutionary branch had an easy path. As generations of survivors continued to adapt to their new existences, the near-surface Chromatics embraced the light, while the deep-dwelling howlers took the darkness as their own. In time, they adapted to both the dry, oppressive geothermal heat, and the impenetrable darkness.

Howlers' and Chromatics' evolutionary trajectory diverged physically and psionically. While Chromatics learned to harvest and manipulate light, the howlers had nothing to rely on but themselves, and learned that their bodies were their primary strength. Howlers are biokinetics, able to shift their flesh in limited ways to suit the needs of the moment. They can consume most food and water without concern over toxins or other dangers, create a range of sensory organs to help navigate the utter blackness of their deep lairs, and adapt their bodies to forge tools when needed without the inconvenience of carrying more than required for survival. Though howlers lack the full range of transformative abilities of human biokinetics, they easily spawn armor and weaponry to adapt their hunting styles and overwhelm their prey.

Howlers still share a similar appearance to Chromatics. Both have the hunched-over stance, four limbs with tri-digit hands and feet ending in sharp claws. Both species have broad heads and a centrally located mouth in their chest between their front arms. Howlers are larger, stronger, and have paler skin than Chromatics. They also lack the colorful eyespots and glowing patches that mark their cousins. Howler forelimbs are longer as they often travel on all fours for stability in the darkness. They have longer, heavier tails for balance and to help them rapidly shift direction when hunting at speed. Howlers' front eyes atrophied almost to the point of uselessness, being able to judge the level of illumination in an area but little else. This rarely limits the creatures as they can generate functional eyes through biokinesis when needed.

Howlers also lack the eyes on the sides of their heads that Chromatics have, instead they possess deep cavities that channel sounds to their ears, giving them excellent hearing. A pair of organs in front of these cavities produce streams of ultrasound clicks for echolocation, enabling howlers to build a constantly updated picture of the environment around them. When howlers hunt, they supplement this ultrasound with loud, guttural grunts and cries from their rudimentary vocal chords, possibly providing them more tactical detail but giving rise to their "howler" name.

Howlers are as intelligent as Chromatics but have a more individualistic, self-reliant social structure. Small, female-led family units hunt in packs of no more than four to six individuals. Howlers subconsciously "communicate" through a cocktail of complex pheromones that dictate behavior and status but also detail genetic diversity and breeding compatibility. Howler pack encounters depend on the current scarcity of food, the size of the packs, age of individuals and response to these pheromones. Engagements most often lead to the packs going their separate ways without risking injury and death, although violent clashes are common if resources are scarce. More rarely, two or more howlers from different packs react to the pheromones of the other and pair up as the nucleus of a new pack. This results in something akin to a marriage alliance between families — all three (or more) packs depart peacefully and the two "parent" packs are less likely to attack each other in future.

Howlers have a fast metabolism and need to hunt almost constantly to satisfy its needs. They aren't beyond eating their own kind and even consume fallen kin if no other food is available. However, they prefer to eat other creatures when possible. Chromatic flesh, rich with psionic potential, is particularly filling for howlers, whose appetites diminish considerably for several days after consuming an entire Chromatic. This period gives howlers a respite from hunger, to reflect on life and engage in more intellectual pursuits. Pursuing this effect led to the great wars between howlers and Chromatics with the howlers winning many early victories before individual Chromatic dynasties put aside their differences and fought the howlers back to the deep darkness. Though defeated, the howlers aren't gone and frequently linger just beneath the near-surface chambers the Chromatics call home, sometimes intruding to the light areas to snatch away unwary travelers, isolated workers — or wayward children — all to indulge in a temporary reprieve from the constant hunger.

Most adult howlers possess Psi 3 with 3 dots in Adaptation and 2 dots each in Psychomorphing and Transmogrify. True howler horrors — creatures out of Chromatic nightmares — possess Psi 4, 3 dots in Adaptation and Psychomorphing, and 4 dots in Transmogrify. These deadly monsters are fortunately rare, but when they engage Chromatics in open warfare, they bring to bear an unpredictable array of forms and functions from Chrome Prime's other hostile flora and fauna. Howlers horrors can even disguise themselves as Chromatics through their biokinetic mastery. While they lack understanding of the

nuances of Chromatic society, their disguise sows misery and fear among Chromatic tribes as the horror devours its way through the clan. Howler horrors could also mimic humans if they encountered the aliens, with similarly terrifying results. Howlers have no understanding of bioware but would quickly learn if they obtained Chromatic equipment and had the mental freedom from hunger to study the devices.

### HOWLER/HOWLER HORROR (MEDIUM/MODERATE THREAT)

**Primary Pool:** 13/15 (adaptable hunter)

**Secondary Pool:** 8 (survival)

**Desperation Pool:** 3

**Defense:** 4

**Health:** 4

**Edges:** Danger Sense, Hardy 3, Iron Will 1, Swift

**Psi Trait:** 3/4

**Psi Modes:** Adaptation 3, Psychomorphing 2/3, Transmogrify 2/4

**Equipment Bonuses:** +2 Enhancement (biokinetic adaptability)

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Echolocation and Biokinetic Senses:** A howler constantly constructs a three-dimensional map of its physical environment and biokinetically supplements this with whatever additional senses seem necessary for the situation — including Biosense. Howlers are almost impossible to sneak up on and may make an Awareness roll to notice someone's presence no matter from what direction a target approaches.

- **Natural Biokinesis:** Howlers evolved to rely on their bodies for whatever challenge the darkness brings. Shifting their bodies to meet requirements is as natural to them as breathing. Any rolls to reflect a howler's Biokinesis receive 2 Enhancement and their cost is reduced by 1 (to a minimum of 0).

## INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Chrome Prime provides little indication that the Chromatics have advanced, spacefaring technology. It has no modern cities (above or below ground), no transportation infrastructure and almost no industry. In orbit, the Chromatics converted eight of the ring's largest asteroids into shipyards catering to their bioship fleet.

On the planet, a single location — called White Rocks Holding — has dozens of high-tech biotech fabrication plants all nestled together in a haphazard fashion around squat, stone ziggurats that appear ancient in design but are only a few decades old. The discarded ziggurats house hardtech functions that laid the foundations and supply for the more advanced biotech factories. For every functioning biotech factory, another ten lie abandoned. The Chromatics either discarded the factory when it wore out, or deserted when the next, more advanced factory commenced operations slightly further out in the expanding disk.

White Rocks Holding has little order. The Chromatics place new factories wherever they find the next suitable piece of dirt. Roadways connect all the factories in a tangled web suggesting little or no planning. As a result, visitors can review the Chromatics' industrial progress like counting rings in a tree, and is a snapshot of humanity's biotech innovation. The abandoned factories closest to the center are the oldest and least sophisticated, and resemble Orgotek's first biofactory attempts. Those towards the outside are newer and most active and mimic humanity's more modern designs. This single industrial precinct also clearly reveals the singular focus on preparing the planet for interstellar war.

An orbital launch facility sits apart from the factories, connected by a wide, well-used gravel road. Transport vehicles travel back and forth all hours of the day and night, moving components to the facility's many warehouses. This launch facility is more orderly than the factory site with a dozen advanced laser launch systems arranged in a grid to boost crew containers and starship modules up to the orbital asteroid shipyards. The starport design is also eerily reminiscent of human spaceports on Mars and Luna. In addition to the warehouses that protect biotech components prior to orbital transfer, a squadron of biotech fighters ready to launch at a moment's notice defends the starport against all intruders.

### TELEPORTATION DAMPENERS

A calibrated noetic field blankets all of Chrome Prime. This field specifically interferes with attempts to teleport to or from the planet's surface. A network of hundreds of noetic transmitters constructed

around the planet sustains the field. The towers vary in appearance — some are carefully carved square stone columns, others are haphazardly cemented pillars of whatever rocks where available, while still others take advantage of natural features, hollowed out for the task. Whatever its appearance, each column is just a protective shell guarding a bioware core that generates the disruptive signal. Its creators designed this system with high redundancy and destroying one or even several towers won't degrade the signal. Attacker must disrupt at least a quarter of the network before the interference starts to degrade, and it persists in a weakened form as long as a single tower remains.

The teleportation dampener field functions like the disruptive aspects of Spatial Integrity (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 254), imposing a +20 Complication for teleportation across the entire planet. For each 25% of the network destroyed or disrupted, reduce the Complication by 5, to a minimum of +5 as long as even a single tower remains. Failing to buy off the Complication prevents entering or leaving Chrome Prime's orbital space through teleportation, out to around 500,000 kilometers away from the planet. The dampener knocks teleporters who attempt to visit Chrome Prime off course, causing them to appear somewhere else in the Chrome Prime system — how far away from Chrome Prime depends on how much of the Complication remained. The field also prevents teleporters from exiting the planet's orbital space through teleportation means, regardless of the strength of any noetic connection. Teleporters using their powers on Chrome Prime (or whatever they're teleporting) randomly appear somewhere on or beneath the planet's surface. This may place them in immediate danger, depending on how much of the Complication the teleporters bought off.

# THE CRÈCHE SYSTEM

Five Earth-sized planets and the fractured remains of a sixth in a single orbit around a Sol-like star. Nascent life forms of such vastness and potential that raise wonder in humans and fuel anger and resentment in humanity's alien "benefactors." The Crèche system reminds humanity that even after centuries of experience with Quantum-fueled gods and psionically empowered explorers, our understanding of the universe is still far from complete, and it still has an untold number of lessons to teach us.

Crèche so far has no permanent human colonies, though several planets are prime candidates. In part this is because Crèche is a new discovery, but more accurately colonization and exploration have been hampered by a massive disruptive effect Crèche exerts on psionic (and possibly Quantum-fueled) powers within the system.

## DISCOVERY

Humans discovered the system they'd come to call Crèche in 2123 when a team of clairsentient surveyors suddenly found their attention drawn to a system they'd previously glanced at and looked past for its apparent lack of anything remarkable. The ISRAns say that they didn't really find the system so much as it called out to them. One moment the system was just another background blip in the rich tapestry of the subquantum fabric, the next it lit up like a beacon — or a flare — demanding that the humans pay attention to its call. The clears described the experience like a dream where you simply know everyone present and accept the interactions and relationships, and only begin to question the experience and understand you didn't actually recognize anyone when you awaken.

Despite this celestial beacon burning so brightly, the clairsentients couldn't discern any fine detail of the system other than an impression of the existence of planets. Perhaps the shining brilliance was what prevented a clear understanding of what lay beneath it. The fact that all the clairsentients in the team separately described the same dreamlike experience — the confusion, the brilliance, and the overwhelming sense of panic and sorrow — added to the intrigue, leading ISRA to seek the Æon Trinity's assistance in quickly mobilizing an exploration team to learn more of this baffling new phenomenon.

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The first survey team to arrive in the system didn't know precisely what to expect. The small expedition thought it was prepared for whatever it discovered, with orders to defend and retreat as soon as possible if the situation proved too dangerous to handle. Expedition planners planned out various scenarios, from the system being an elaborate trap to a vast

## PLANETARY DATA: CRÈCHE I, II, III, IV, V, REMAINS OF CRÈCHE VI

Foundation: Not yet colonized
Discovery: 2123
Distance from Earth: 6,873 light years.
Star: Crèche — G3
Diameter: 12,518–13,088 km
Gravity: 0.98–1.03 Earth
Atmosphere: Crèche I — Oxygen, nitrogen (breathable)
Air Pressure: ~ 1.01 Earth
Temperature: −30° C to 40° C
Percentage Ocean: 74%
Rotation Period: 24-26 hours
Native Life: High diversity of animals, vegetables, and microbes on several planets

intra-system psionic war taking place, and decided that a small, well-protected team would be best to survey the situation and report back. As such, the Æon Trinity designed the first team around quick insertion, information gathering, and defense if needed. It included a teleporter, two clears, a psychokinetic, vitakinetic, and a telepath, all traveling in a modified Scarab strike frigate with sufficient supplies to last a week.

Trouble began before the team even arrived. With everyone linked in a telepathic network, the teleporter was working off the fuzzy sensory impressions gained from the clairsentients to guide the jump. She aimed for the team to arrive deep within the system but bounced off a tremendous interference, rematerializing the ship just beyond the orbit of the system's outermost gas giant. Almost immediately upon arrival, the telepath collapsed, clutching his head, and screaming for the pain to stop. Thankfully his torment broke his concentration and severed the telepathic network a few moments after the pain began. Unfortunately, those few moments were enough to give the rest of the team a taste of his ordeal.

The vitakinetic was the first to act, falling back on her training to work through the disorientation and tend to the telepath. After trying and failing to channel her psi powers to either diagnose or heal the telepath, she eventually had to sedate him to stop his agony. Later in the mission debrief she reported that she'd suffered what felt like a massive psionic backlash pulsing outwards from the inner system and blocking her attempts to diagnose and treat her afflicted colleague.

Though still shaky from the sudden psychic shock the clears attempted a psionic survey but reported they had trouble focusing on the interior of the planets to glean much precise information. They described the situation as trying to see a forest from deep within it, with the exact thing they wanted to see constantly obscuring their view. They managed to gain a vague impression of a bracelet of beads before losing even this strange detail.

The psychokinetic had no similar problems, but also reported high levels of interference when he tried to focus on his powers. He also described a sense of something deeply powerful manipulating irresistible but incredibly subtle telekinetic channels somewhere within the system. The only time he had felt anything similar was when he had participated in an Aberrant-repelling action alongside Proxy Larssen, and even that felt tiny in comparison to this new experience. For her part, the teleporter felt undulations in the fabric of space-time that made it hard to get a fix on the team's own psionic coordinates, let alone knowing where anything was within the system. Even the gas giant planet so clearly obvious outside their ship's windows was just a vague impression of possible mass within all the static. Witnessing the overwhelming effects of unknown origin on her team, she made the executive decision

to withdraw the expedition back to a safe distance as soon as she was able.

## REGROUP AND RETURN

Using the Scarab's conventional engines and a series of shorter range, visually guided jumps, the teleporter eventually managed to get the team out to the system's Oort Cloud where Crèche's star was just a slightly brighter light shining in the blackness. The psionic confusion eased dramatically this far out but didn't disappear entirely. The persistent low-level droning shock kept pushing at the psions and making it more difficult to use their powers, but it no longer overwhelmed their abilities or clouded their minds.

While the team collected their thoughts and compared their experiences, the clears discovered that something had filled their focus crystals with alien sensory impressions of confusion and grief. Once the telepath recovered from sedation — with no apparent lingering effects — he reported that what he had suffered was unfocused and didn't appear to be hostile but was akin to a psionic backlash caused by massive trauma. The exploratory team unanimously agreed that the events necessitated their return to Earth to reassess how to approach the system.

Back on Earth, careful review of the focus crystals revealed that the messages embedded within were unfocused and jumbled, lacking the composure of clear communication. They most closely resembled the wailing, confused cries of distress from infants. The language and imagery were alien and unlike anything Æon's specialists had encountered before, but the sentiment was not. Something was clearly suffering and was calling out in the confusion for help. Despite the danger, the Æon Trinity constructed a larger, more prepared expedition from its own resources and any of the psi orders who cared to join. The mission would be cautious but dedicated to gathering more concrete information; the Æon Trinity assigned the Leviathan jump ship Melbourne along with the hardtech frigates Dar es Salaam and Varkaus to closely investigate these worlds. From reviewing the available date, the mission planners were keenly aware of the potential impact on any psions involved in the expedition. They stocked the ships with plenty of psi-dampening biotechnology for the crew's use and also included as many neutrals on their crews as possible.

## WONDER REVEALED

The Melbourne and its companion ships appeared just outside the system, knocked off course just as

the previous expedition had been. Soon after arrival and checking all systems in the ship, its clairsentient pilot reported that the Leviathan appeared to be scared and refused to go any closer. The Melbourne had dropped into a low energy state that the clears and telepaths could all feel as a kind of despair. The telepaths on this second expedition all had Mind Shields firmly in place that were holding against the unwanted intrusions but they could still feel the presence breaking against their psionic walls. None of the non-psionic humans noted any issues. With the Leviathan sullenly languishing in the outer reaches of the system, the expedition's leadership decided to use it as a fallback base of operations and prepared crews to take the smaller frigates to move in closer, with teleporter assistance if possible, but otherwise using conventional drives.

The journeys from the outer reaches of the system to the inner planets took weeks. The ships paused at each of the three outer planets to conduct basic survey work but as they worked their way closer it was clear that their goal was in the system's interior. Non-psionic stellar readings showed a pulsing to the star's emissions that made little astrophysical sense and tantalized the expedition's scientists.

Even with preparation and shielding and boosting bioapps, the frigates' teleporters couldn't bring the ships in closer to the star than an approximately Jupiter-like orbit. As the ships traveled closer to the center the psions aboard became less able to use their powers to assist the expedition. Most wore psi-nullifying bioapps near continuously to block out the backlash that continued to pervade the system, though these also cut the psions from their abilities. The force of the interference quickly overwhelmed the few who tried removing the devices.

As the Dar es Salaam and Varkaus approached the roughly Earth-equivalent orbital zone, the crews were astonished by what they found. A Klemperer rosette of five Earth-like planets all occupying the same orbit around a middle-aged G-type star, with rocky fragments of what was presumably a sixth planet taking its place in the rosette. Scientists believed Klemperer rosettes to be physically impossible and inevitably unstable due to minute gravitational imbalances that inevitably led to cascading, cataclysmic failure. The astrophysicists wouldn't have believed it if they weren't seeing it for themselves. Additionally, the shattered planet's remains stayed localized and hadn't begun spreading to a ring or colliding to form the molten beginnings of a new planet. Whatever kept the alignment running and the planetary remains in their place intrigued the scientists as the discovery of a lifetime.

## THE SIX PLANETS

The scientists aboard the frigates may have been without noetic senses but they put hardtech sensors and drones to work. The psionic static suggested the five intact planets were somehow alive on a scale surpassing humanity's understanding. Observing the reactions of psions from various Aptitudes to each planet, scientists hypothesized that each planet resonated with a specific Aptitude. Each Aptitude greatly influenced the planet's environment and surface, ranging from overgrown with life to incredibly hostile to human survival. None of the Crèche worlds have moons and their rotational axes are neatly aligned with the orbital plane, resulting in quite stable conditions with no seasonal variance.

Crèche I has a strong vitakinesis signature and teems with life. Overgrown jungles cover the land masses, while the oceans show indications of significant sea life. Early surveys indicate it is well suited to colonization prepared to deal with rapidly growing, invasive species. Crèche II appears to resonate with clairsentience and is the most Earth-like. In fact, the planet almost appears to be adjusting itself to meet human expectations. Certainly, the long-range scans didn't reveal the hospitable environment that closer-range drones and landing teams discovered.

Crèche III is a powerhouse of psychokinesis, counteracting the gravitational imbalances of so many planetary bodies in the same orbit. Its surface constantly changes from lava flows and its atmosphere burns with fiery plasma. Scientists are uncertain if the inhospitable environment is from the considerable psionic strain the planet is under, or if it's normal. Crèche IV gives strong biokinetic readings and like Crèche I is home to a multitude of life forms. Observations from drones reveal that there is little separation between animals and plants. In addition, most life forms appear to possess both exceptionally keen senses that extend well beyond the sensory range found on Earth, and a talent for camouflage that rivals or surpasses the best biotech metamaterials Orgotek can create. Even drones with advanced sensors regularly lose track of animals, as they change color and pattern in exceptionally precise ways. Scientists are unsure if the planet would be amenable to a human colony, or if these life forms might prove both dangerous and almost impossible to spot until they attack.

Crèche V resonates strongly with telepathy, and is the source of most of the overwhelming noetic static preventing psions from operating in the system. Its barren surface could host a Mars-like colony, but everyone nearing the planet — even neutrals — feels loss and pain and an oppressive sense of never being alone. While no one knows what Aptitude Crèche VI displayed, hypotheses suggest that it may have been a secondary source of psychokinesis — noting the considerable strain Crèche III experiences — or may have resonated with electrokinesis. Fragments of an unknown metallo-organic mesh retrieved by drones gives some credence to this theory. However, some of the most powerful clairsentients who have attempted to psionically examine these worlds report that the Aptitudes are only partially localized in each of the six worlds. These clears believe that every one of the surviving Crèche planets possesses at least some degree of biokinesis, clairsentience, electrokinesis, psychokinesis, telepathy, and vitakinesis.

## THE UNRECOGNIZED THREAT

Though humanity doesn't realize it, their interest in Crèche has set them on a course of direct conflict with the Doyen, who are jealous of the secrets the system may reveal. The Doyen are paranoid, cautious, and intolerant of other races surpassing their own psionic mastery. These aliens are also immensely jealous of any race that successfully transcends into another state of being — something the Doyen attempted and failed to accomplish (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 359).

The Doyen discovered the six Crèche planets over five centuries ago and quietly studied them, until recently. The Doyen believed the planets to be the chrysalises of beings preparing to transcend to subtle noetic realms beyond this universe, and hoped to discover how to undo the damage they'd inflicted on their own evolution that may forever deny them entry to these realms. The slumbering, transforming planets were quiet while the Doyen were careful and merely observed — if the being was aware of their scrutiny it gave no indication. Though the Doyen learned much from psionic probing of the planets, they never understood they were in fact observing a single being distributed across multiple physical shells.

Eventually, the Doyen realized they wouldn't find any more answers from passive observation. Annoyed, jealous, and petty, the Doyen weren't content to leave the chrysalis undisturbed. Using immensely powerful psychokinetic forces they directed asteroids and comets from the system's outer reaches to rain down on Crèche VI, bombarding it with tremendous force that eventually cracked the psionic crystal matrix holding the nascent transcendent entity. The force of the disruption gave rise to a massive noetic explosion that destroyed the planet, and a psionic shockwave of equal magnitude that destroyed dozens of nearby Doyen and forced the remainder from the system with the after effects. The pain and terror somewhat woke the Crèche being in a panic, and its unfocused outburst of psi to defend itself shined through and attracted human attention. This overwhelming field of psionic static, emotion, and feedback has prevented the Doyen from returning to the system as they lack the physical forms to continue even if they could shut their psi down.

This first attack caught Crèche by surprise, but now it's ready to defend itself. The death of several

### SIX PLANETS, ONE LIFE FORM

While scientists currently believe each Crèche planet to be individual variations of a massive, psionically active species, the truth is that all six planets are the distributed essence of a single being slowly transforming into purely noetic form. When complete, the energies within each planet combine and the creature transcends this physical universe.

It may be able to complete its transformation without the sixth planet, but it's trying to repair the damage anyway. Crèche III is reassembling the broken planetary fragments for Crèche I to heal. These repairs occur at a rate that the humans haven't yet noticed but could be complete within a year if no one starts strip-mining the valuable psionically active crystal within Crèche VI's remains.

Although Crèche hardly registers human activity on a conscious level, it would certainly notice if they damaged its recovery — much like humans rarely notice ants until they become troublesome or damaging.

## CRÈCHE AND SCREAM

Humanity discovered Scream (p. XX) and Crèche in much the same way — two seemingly featureless areas of the sky suddenly flared to life and demanded attention. Human explorers who answered this demand couldn't have found two more different discoveries. One is a Quantum-fueled technological nightmare, the other an improbable arrangement of planets, blanketed in a psionic shockwave forcing psions to suppress their powers or stay away. Scientists believe there is a link between the two, but do not understand either the cause or the mechanism.

These scientists are somewhat correct, but the systems were never meant to be linked. Crèche woke with a psionic scream that transcended distance and reality when the Doyen shattered one of its planets. Scream's Quantum-twisted machinery was waiting for some signal from its terraforming creators and believed Crèche's scream was it. In response to the psionic waves, Scream spews forth corrupting Quantum communications hoping for an answer.

Unfortunately for Scream, Crèche can't communicate with it, either because of the disruptive interference between psi and Quantum, or because Crèche's planetary destruction stole its electrokinetic ability and capacity to soothe the shrieking planet. All Crèche can do is try to drown out the painful cacophony with its own psionic noise. Scream's blind response is to scream louder, continually transforming to find the secret communication that will force a response. Caught within the individual mysteries of both systems, scientists have no idea what to do with what is essentially an interstellar yelling match. Also, they don't know if finding a way to stop the contest is preferable to letting it drag on.

of their own terrified the Doyen, but they also want to learn more — and to avenge their fallen comrades. Unfortunately, Crèche's psionic disruptions prevent the disembodied aliens from entering the system. To overcome this, the Doyen plan on possessing human servants to return to Crèche. What the Doyen don't know — and fear finding out — is whether the awoken Crèche knows they were responsible, can sense their presence, and can retaliate even while they're protected within human shells. So far, the Doyen lingering near the Melbourne only know that Crèche doesn't yet appear hostile to humanity.

# ENTERPRISE

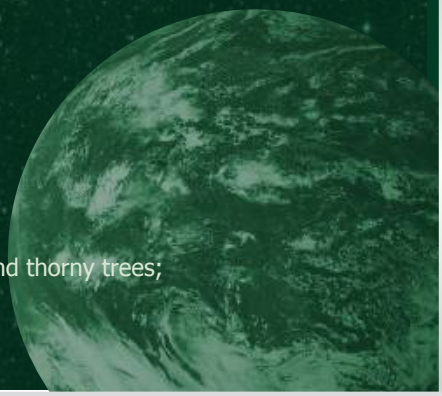
Enterprise began as a corporate colony, owned and operated by Enterprise, LLC, itself a corporate front for a single man: Anson Hartwell, also known as Lingua Franca. His involvement with the colony was purely financial, however, and while it was one of his largest and most potentially lucrative projects, it was only one among many. Hartwell handed it off to Ingenium, another Aberrant, who constructed the Shortcut, a permanent spatial gateway between Earth and 14 Herculis c. On the alien world, rugged but livable, a massive research complex called Enterprise City bloomed, free from oversight by the United Nations and Project Utopia, where — for an exorbitant fee — a corporation could develop technology without worrying about one of these organizations confiscating their work halfway through prototyping. For all that the world itself was harsh, even deadly, Enterprise quickly became one of the jewels of the first wave of colonization, a symbol of humanity's extrasolar future.

## THE CUTTING OF THE CORD

Enterprise was a phenomenal success, but it wouldn't last. Thirty-four years after its inception, Hartwell, maddened with Corruption, burst from his Northern California corporate compound, cut a swath straight to the gateway, and pulled his mutated body through. Having lived in seclusion for over a decade amidst a cult that by now worshipped him as a literal godhead, Hartwell lost not only his grip on a human worldview, but on his human form. He had become the Glitch — an amorphous octopoid being, standing nearly twelve feet tall on long, spindly tentacles three times as long, as though gravity were

## PLANETARY DATA: ENTERPRISE

**Founded:** 2031
**Discovery:** 2027 (Interferometric space telescope survey)
**Rediscovered:** 2123 (Upeo/ISRA Survey)
**Distance from Earth:** 57 light years
**Star:** 14 Herculis (K0 V)
**Diameter:** 10,434 km
**Gravity:** .93 Earth
**Atmosphere:** Oxygen and nitrogen (breathable)
**Air Pressure:** .81 Earth
**Percentage Ocean:** 36%
**Rotation Period:** 10 hours
**Native Life:** Hardy plants, mainly long grasses and thorny trees; radially symmetrical land crustaceans
**Human Population:** Less than 1,000



only a minor concern, his skin covered in rapidly oscillating chromatophores.

The spatial torsion severed the linkage and shredded the machinery of the Shortcut irreparably. No one heard from Enterprise ever again. Over a million souls were on the far side of the Shortcut: contractors, scientists, maintenance personnel, and a marketing team giving a tour to 27 unlucky prospective clients. Enterprise City had long-term housing and support for, at best, 100,000. With a rampaging Aberrant they were likely unprepared to deal with, no one held out much hope for the Enterprisers. When initial clairsentient surveys of Enterprise City in the 2110s revealed only hazy impressions of a shattered and apparently uninhabited ruin that still festered with Corruption, recontact with Enterprise was deprioritized.

In fact, just over a thousand humans still live on Enterprise, the descendants of the original million trapped on the planet. Only about two hundred, however, are remotely free — the remainder live in thrall to the Glitch.

### AN OUT OF CONTEXT PROBLEM

After the Glitch emerged from and subsequently destroyed the Shortcut, he spent several days poking and prodding his way through buildings with luminous, psychedelic tentacles that induced violent and occasionally deadly seizures. Order collapsed completely within the first few hours. Many Enterprisers sheltered in place, following dust storm protocol that did nothing to keep out a determined Aberrant, while others fled the city on foot or via all-terrain vehicles. Eventually, the Glitch located the access point to the underground infrastructure and vanished inside. He would reemerge again after a few days, but in that interval, more Enterprisers deserted the city.

Over the course of the next year, a pattern emerged. The Glitch spent most of his time hiding within a deep laboratory complex, only emerging for inscrutable reasons. Occasionally, he would take a human captive. He released some later, but others vanished forever — this pattern holds through the modern day, although the Glitch has far fewer humans to pick from. Food stores in Enterprise City ran out long before they could establish sustainable agriculture, and many who fled the city succumbed in droves to hunger or exposure long before that time. The population of Enterprise cratered, dropping to 10,000 after five years of isolation and steadily declined ever since.

### ENTERPRISE CITY

Prior to the Shortcut's collapse, Enterprise City required a full-time maintenance task force to repair infrastructure damaged by the planet's ferocious dust storms, capture and relocate the conch-crabs who were eager to use human houses as shelter, and fight

## ANSON HARTWELL — THE GLITCH

Famed in the 2020s for his ability to speak a language fluently after only minutes of exposure, Anson Hartwell was renowned both as a negotiator and as an invaluable archive of over a hundred endangered languages, which he learned as a hobby throughout his life prior to the Aberrant War. He could not only learn languages, but encode constructed neolanguages with ease. Starting around 2035, he began using this ability to subtly rewrite the minds of those around him using constructed languages as a vector, which only served to magnify his cult of personality and which ultimately created a feedback loop that led to his degeneration.

It is unknown whether Hartwell is still capable of communication, as direct visual exposure to Hartwell damages the human brain — specifically, Broca's area, the language processing center of the brain. Short-term exposure can cause seizures as well as transient stuttering or other language disorders, while long-term exposure induces permanent damage. High-fidelity video of Hartwell carries the same effects as a direct encounter — only the OpNet Crash stopped the viral profusion of a video of his flight through the Shortcut, dubbed "The Glitch," which rendered nearly 30,000 people permanently aphasic and gave the monstrosity Hartwell had become its name. Project ReWrite secured and destroyed all known copies of the video.

Today, the Glitch is a Terat Aberrant with a Corruption of 8. It's Size 2, and has the following Qualities: Armor (Complete, Hard 3, Innocuous), Baleful Touch, Multi-Tasking, Regeneration, and Unstoppable, and these Mutations: Disruption (enfeeblement), Incapacitate, Mode Analog (Algesis • • • (Ruin), this power only attacks language centers of the brain and has no cost and it is an automatic effect of seeing the Glitch), and Quantum Wind.

a never-ending battle against the practically unkillable and razor-sharp scalpel-grass. Unsurprisingly, because most of the city lies abandoned, the elements have taken their toll. Native vegetation has almost entirely reclaimed the outer perimeter, and most of the streets, the pavement cracked as new shoots break through. Local animals infest virtually every building still vaguely intact, as even the remains of collapsed buildings are offer better shelter than most other locations on Enterprise.

A few buildings remain standing in the city's center. A cluster of human survivors live here, none of whom can speak or comprehend language. Repeated exposure to the Glitch has permanently altered their brains, but they are otherwise fully self-aware and able to learn by example. They have maintained a basic degree of expertise in certain critical skills, such as hydroponics. Virtually all suffer some degree of mutation or Quantum Flux illness due to Corruption exposure, with a handful reaching sub-Aberrant mutant status. Observers suspect that some of these diseases are unique to this world. To the human survivors in Enterprise City, the Glitch is a force of nature, a constant that occupies a central role in a fragmented series of personal pantheons.

### THE WILDERNESS

Outside Enterprise City, grassy steppes and thick stands of short trees with strong taproots dominate this world's biome. Ceaseless winds caused by Enterprise's rapid rotation roll across the broad plains, sometimes reaching speeds of 200 kph or more and carrying clouds of dust and sharp bits of scalpel-grass with it. Only a rare few mountain ranges block the wind, which has sculpted and eroded them into low, strange, windblown shapes. The few survivors tenaciously cling to life in basins on the leeward side of these ranges.

Most of those who joined the exodus out of Enterprise City died in the first few months, having exhausted what meager food and water supplies they were able to bring with them. A few encampments, however, were able to endure, finding shelter and quickly determining what native flora and fauna was edible. These groups of survivors fanned out, seeking other survivors, occasionally succeeding in rescuing one or two, and coming together into a single camp of about 500 people, ranging in age from early 20s to late 70s. They have subsisted ever since, hunting conch-crabs and steppe clams, sheltering in caves when the windstorms descended, slowly patching

## THE SPEECHLESS

The human brain is a messy, complicated thing, even with decades of noetic science and centuries of neurology providing insights. It's important to note, however, that aphasia (and, in particular, aphasia caused by the Glitch) is not simply being unable to speak, but being partially or totally unable to engage with language itself, even nonverbally. Young children who have yet to encounter the Glitch (a rare cohort among the Speechless) would be able to learn language from others, but their parents and other adults around them are unable to demonstrate it.

Telepaths attempting contact with the Speechless contact a mind that communicates only in bursts of concepts, images, and emotions, structured and self-aware but totally nonverbal. To make themselves understood, they'll need to express themselves in kind. Speechless are likely to be shocked not only by someone understanding them, but also because they can understand another person — they've been so isolated they have forgotten even the concept of language.

Vitakinetics with Restore Template can reverse the damage to the brains of the Glitch's victims, and therefore restore their capacity to use and understand language. It cannot, however, enable adults who have never learned language to do so — this would require either the Adjust Template vitakinesis power or a specially designed bioapp.

together what little of the technology they could escape with as it malfunctioned and failed over time.

Many of these survivors encountered the Glitch before or during their escape, and they now suffer language disorders or deficits. However, enough escaped unharmed that subsequent generations, thanks to a concerted effort, retained speech. Between multiple first languages and speech problems in adults, however, those generations experienced rapid linguistic drift — Inspirish, as it's now spoken, is a confusing melange, consisting primarily of English and Spanish morphology but peppered with words and phrases from half a dozen others.

The population slowly dropped over time. Elders died without further issue on-planet, and others opted not to have children in such an environment. Combined with resource shortages and occasional clashes with the Speechless (as they now call the aphasic cult of the Glitch), the population has declined to slightly more than 200 by 2123, none of whom remember Enterprise City as it was. They know Earth only as a legend, an Eden that a flickering monster that steals tongues and yet squats in the heart of Enterprise City cast them out of. Few have hopes of returning to such a place. Enterprise is the world they know, and they have little time for such fancies when survival is so difficult.

### PLANS FOR RECONTACT

When further surveys conducted by Legion clairsentients, seeking to determine the nature of the Aberrant threat on Enterprise, inadvertently discovered human survivors, the calculus shifted radically, and what was once a tactical assessment became a potential rescue mission. The Glitch has only grown in power and Corruption since the Aberrant War, however, and his nest beneath Enterprise City is practically impossible to survey — the area counts as a heavy Quantum Flux zone (Trinity Continuum: Æon, p. 192), and attempts to gain any information about the Glitch via clairsentience risks neural damage. General Larssen is committed to extracting as many human survivors as she can, but is unwilling to risk the lives of her soldiers on such an unknown situation — instead, she's recommended a quiet fact-finding mission to Enterprise.

*A battle rages across the stars*, proclaimed an Æon Trinity recruiting slogan of the late 2110s, *you are the weapon*. Ivdel is humanity's reminder that the universe does not revolve around it and some interstellar battles have nothing to do with Earth. Formerly colonized by a previously unknown species, an attack wiped Ivdel clean of sapient life before humanity arrived in the Kholat Syakhl system. The joint UN/Æon Trinity mission here focuses on analyzing what is, for all intents and purposes, a planetary-scale crime scene.

## TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

The Æon Trinity first became aware of the Kholat Syakhl system in mid-2121, when an ISRA long-range survey revealed indicators of an impending unspecified catastrophe. The prediction's vague nature and the demands of contemporary events delayed investigation until the Upeo mission queue opened up in 2123. A six-ship task force under UN command arrived at the system's heliopause on June 4th and began cautiously working its way inward. Telescopic and clairsentient observation of the star's fourth planet, one of two in its liquid water zone, indicated a large amount of refined metal in orbit, so the mission focused on that world.

On June 21st, as the survey vessel UNSGC Vilgeroarson crossed inside the planet's lunar orbit, it came under attack from a previously undetected vessel. The teleporter on board jumped the badly damaged Vilgeroarson to safety while the Seventh Legion frigate UNS Ellen Ripley and Polish cruiser ORP Gdansk engaged and destroyed the aggressor.

Further reconnaissance revealed no more lurking ambushers. However, surveys determined that the orbiting metal was the remains of an immense vessel, estimated to have been 8,500 meters long and 120 million tons. Observation of the surface showed several major craters from debris strikes, as well as four larger impact sites surrounded by the remains of manufactured structures.

Humans first set foot on Ivdel on July 10th, landing on the fringes of the largest ruined settlement. The recon teams found no survivors — only the remains of deliberate extermination. Forensic examination indicated the massacre had occurred less than a year ago.

## THE SCENE

Ivdel (formally Kholat Syakhl IV) is a small super-Earth planet, technically habitable but highly inhospitable to humans. It broadly resembles Earth in the late Carboniferous Period. Atmospheric oxygen concentrations are 35% compared to Earth's modern 21%. This causes oxygen toxicity in unprotected visitors, makes fire a constant and powerful threat, and oxidizes many alloys that are robust in an Earth-normal environment. Overall, Ivdel is slightly cooler than Earth. Rocky deserts dominate the northern hemisphere's single continent, both southern land masses are densely forested, and the poles are ice-capped. The equatorial island chains are lush jungles where aggressive vulcanism hasn't seared them bare. A single massive, barren, airless moon named Lozva orbits Ivdel, generating robust tidal action.

Ivdel's high gravity, high atmospheric pressure, and high partial pressure of oxygen combine to yield flora and fauna of unusual size. Local trees approach the structural strength of orbital alloy and frequently reach 80 meters in height. Only insect-analogues, some up to a meter long, have permanently colonized the land. As they adapt to gravity without the support of seawater, their ancestors' nine-limbed trilateral symmetry is giving way to a flatter profile. A typical "iv-bug's" dorsal lobe features well-developed sensory organs and vestigial top limbs, with the left and right ventral lobes reversing this model. A few species display rudimentary tool use in their dorsal limbs, using sticks to probe for prey or leaves to shield themselves from the sun.

Local amphibians retain trilateral symmetry within their semi-rigid exoskeletons. The largest observed to date reach six meters long, weigh in at several tons, and are painfully awkward out of water. No carnivorous amphibians are known; the herbivores use dry land as a temporary refuge from aquatic predators.

Researchers have only a cursory knowledge of sea life on Ivdel, since the ongoing investigation remains focused on inland sites. However, there are reports of coastal encounters with creatures reaching 20 meters in length. If the Carboniferous resemblance holds true, the depths of Ivdel's oceans may hold truly immense life forms.

Most scientific and psionic studies have focused on more proximate events, though. In the absence of living primary sources, much of Ivdel's recent history is known through forensic science and psychometric reconstruction.

## THE VICTIMS

Sometime between 1880 and 1910, a species from another star system colonized Ivdel. The colonists were eight-limbed, with four digits on each limb. Their foremost two pairs of limbs were adapted for fine manipulation and tool use, presumably spawning the hexadecimal mathematical system that led Orgotek researchers to dub them Hexers, a name which has stuck despite the broader scientific community's disdain. Their third and fourth pairs of limbs were mainly for support and locomotion, though Hexers could balance solely on their hindmost limbs for short distances. Normal posture was vaguely mantis-like or centauroid, with a strong internal skeleton supporting the forward half of a body whose total length reached four meters in adults. The crown of the head normally rested at a height of around 2.5 meters.

The Hexer head contained six eyes set in a bony circlet, spaced to provide a 300° field of vision. Hexer vision ranged from deep ultraviolet to near-infrared, with visual acuity slightly less than human normal. Beneath the circlet, the mouth contained twelve small feeding tentacles within a sideways-hinged beak. Separate respiratory openings on each side of the neck permitted breathing and vocalizations. There's no connection between their respiratory and alimentary tracts.

Hexer skin was a soft, leathery gray-brown, streaked or dappled in orange and red shades with natural deposits of iron compounds. Skin care against oxidation of these deposits and attendant infections appears to have been a constant concern for Hexers on Ivdel; antioxidant creams and drugs and dermatological grooming devices were ubiquitous in dwellings and personal effects. Hexers were hairless, with thicker skin at friction points and filter membranes inside the respiratory orifices providing the same functions as human hair.

Hexers communicated directly through a combination of gestures and ultra-low-power radio transmissions. The ferrous deposits in their skin seem to have functioned as antennas for the latter, which was organic rather than psionic. This suggests Hexers evolved on a world with strong shielding from solar and cosmic radiation and would be sensitive, perhaps painfully or even damagingly so, to the radios ubiquitous in modern human technology. Hexers were capable of vocalizations but there is no evidence of spoken communication; Hexer "speech" seems to have been limited to signals for attention and expressions of emotion.

Hexer written language and their aforementioned mathematical notation seem inextricably linked. The Hexer alphabet used spiky, angular graphemes derived from forelimb gestures. Insofar as it's possible to reconstruct alien cognitive processes from records and remains, it seems Hexers thought in math as naturally as humans think in colors.

Ivdel's Hexer population arrived in a single massive starship, likely in chemically induced hibernation without benefit of faster-than-light travel. Upon awakening, the Hexers reached the planet via reusable orbital shuttles and established four major settlements. The advanced technology base that served as the colony's seed was sufficient to bootstrap a self-sustaining level of resource extraction and technology roughly equivalent to Earth in the mid-20th century, with the colony ship serving as an industrial hub for limited maintenance of higher tech. By 2120, the planet's Hexer population numbered about 3.5 million.

## THE SUSPECT

Six months before humans reached Kholat Syakhl, another sublight starship, much smaller than the first, entered the system. Using its own approach velocity, this ship released a salvo of projectiles that tore the colony vessel to shreds. It then braked, entered orbit around Ivdel, and struck each Hexer city with one kinetic warhead, targeting the municipal fission power plant.

Perhaps 15% of the Hexers survived this attack, mostly those in outlying communities. But the mopping up began immediately. The attacker zeroed in on the survivors' locations, one at a time, and dispatched expendable drop pods bearing combat robots. Though some Hexers were able to improvise weapons capable of dispatching one or two robots, most had no viable defenses save flight. Many died on the run. A bare handful survived in the wilderness for months before succumbing to nutritional deficiencies or other complications.

Many of the robots remain active on Ivdel today, still searching for survivors to exterminate. They home on structured radio-frequency transmissions, and their target selection criteria don't appear to discriminate between Hexers and humans. The first explorers to run afoul of them — indeed, humans encountered (and fought) the robots before finding the first Hexer corpses — dubbed them Mantes after their superficial resemblance to terrestrial mantis species. In fact, Mantes appear to closely emulate the

## PLANETARY DATA: IVDEL

**Founded:** 2123 (joint United Nations and Æon Trinity research mission)
**Discovery:** 2123 (ISRA)
**Distance from Earth:** 8,700 light years
**Star:** Kholat Syakhl — K2
**Diameter:** 18,926 km
**Gravity:** 1.56 Earth
**Atmosphere:** Oxygen and nitrogen (non-breathable)
**Air Pressure:** 1.74 Earth
**Temperature:** –90º C to 45º C
**Percentage Ocean:** 78%
**Rotation Period:** 35 hours
**Native Life:** Plants; insect-, fish-, and amphibian-analogues
**Human Population:** 750

Hexer body plan, albeit slightly larger. Mantes are five meters long and sleekly artificial.

Mantes are capable of complex tactical reasoning and squads of up to eight appear to work together to stalk and ambush targets. It is unknown whether they have true artificial intelligence or merely sophisticated programming, as their internal communication methods remain unknown and no attempt to establish communication with one has yet succeeded. They don't generally use tools but will improvise or adapt close combat implements if their integral weapons become damaged.

Mantes carry scimitar-shaped retractable blades in each of their four arms. Their chest contains a low-power microwave emitter which has little effect on human or native Ivdel native physiology, though it can disrupt electronics. Researchers believe it to be a stunning or disorienting weapon against Hexers. A compressed-nitrogen gun firing projectiles made of an encapsulated pyrophoric plutonium compound is mounted in the head. Many Mantes have already exhausted their magazines for this system but it remains a horrific antipersonnel weapon for those with ammunition.

Mantes are lightly armored and vulnerable to human personal armament. However, they are surprisingly stealthy for their size and mass. Moreover, they're near-perfectly shielded against most of the electromagnetic spectrum, probably as a stealth measure against Hexer RF senses. This renders them invisible to electrokinetic perception and impervious to the electrical and datawar attacks that normally would be effective against robots.

Researchers possess only limited information on the attacking ship. The crews of Ripley and Gdansk anticipated point defenses on par with its offensive capabilities and launched to saturate its defenses. Its actual lack of defensive armament resulted in significant overkill, and much of the debris impacted Lozva's surface. However, what explorers have recovered suggests that it, like the Mantes, originated from the same technology base as the ship and tech of the Hexers, albeit at a higher level of advancement. More troubling, researchers have found no evidence that the attacking ship was crewed.

### MANTES (MAJOR THREAT)

The most dangerous beings on Ivdel are eight-limbed murderous robots of debatable sapience. These five-meter-long killers wiped out the Hexer colony and are equally capable of taking down unwary human explorers. They demonstrate distressingly complex tactics but have no apparent interest in anything but killing with lightning speed.

**Primary Pool:** 9 (mass murder)
**Secondary Pool:** 7 (guerrilla tactics)
**Desperation Pool:** 5
**Enhancement:** 4

**Defense:** 4

**Health:** 6

**Edges:** Always Prepared, Hair-Trigger Reflexes, Small Unit Tactics

**Built-In Weapons:** The Mantes' design includes the equivalent of a balefire launcher (p. XX, but with short to medium range), four arm-blades (each with the Edged, Deadly, Melee, and Quality 2 tags), and a microwave emitter (treat as an electrolaser gauntlet that only affects electronic devices).

**Armor:** Mantes possess light armor, sufficient to ward off the improvised weapons that formed the Hexer defense but inadequate against prepared human opponents. Their carapaces possess one point of both Hard and Soft armor, with the Complete and Environmental 1 tags.

### SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **EM Shielding:** Any attempt to detect Mantes through electromagnetic means, including electrokinesis, occurs at Difficulty 4. Any attempt to interfere with a robot's operation through electrokinesis is at Difficulty 5 with a level 2 Complication: neglecting to buffer the attempt with meditation, anti-seizure medication, or a safety bioapp inflicts the Stunned Condition on a failure.

## THE INVESTIGATION

Science in the Kholat Syakhl system focuses on three areas. The first is xenological studies of the Hexers themselves. With such a near-miss at first contact, the UN, the Æon Trinity, and many PN governments all want to understand this species before locating its homeworld or another colony. Fortunately, outside the kinetic strike zones, a wealth of Hexer artifacts and documents survived, so linguistic and cultural research is well under way. Hexer writing is easier to decipher than their interpersonal communication, but it's a start. With scores of recent Hexer cadavers, their anatomy and biology are also relatively well-understood for such a newly discovered species.

Locating any surviving Hexers is a high priority. The most recently deceased Hexers located appear

## IVDEL CONSPIRACIES

As information on Ivdel filters back to Earth and the exploratory/investigatory mission grows in size, the planet has become the focus of hyperbolic misinformation and outright fabrications. Characters coming to Ivdel will have heard all of these. It's up to the Storyguide to decide which, if any, have a basis in reality.

- The expedition found a few Hexer survivors and is holding them in a high-security facility.
- The expedition found a few Hexer survivors, but they died in captivity.
- The expedition found a few Hexer survivors, but they're all the equivalent of teenagers and don't have any useful information to share.
- Hexer Aberrants wiped out the Ivdel colony. Of course there are Hexer Aberrants.
- Ivdel was the last colony of a species who fought an interstellar war with the Qin before humanity contacted them. The Qin wiped them out for Qin reasons. The Mantes look like Hexers because they're Hexer weapons that the Qin captured and turned against their makers.
- The Hexer homeworld experienced a machine uprising. The robot overlords sent the Mantes to finish their genocide.
- The Seventh Legion knows the location of the Hexer homeworld and is heading there to bring justice to the parties who sent the attacking ship.
- The UN knows the location of the Hexer homeworld but is hiding it for fear of a war with the parties who sent the attacking ship.
- Orgotek knows the location of the Hexer homeworld but is hiding it until they figure out how to communicate with the Hexers and adapt their computer technology for total market dominance.
- Someone is trying to smuggle reprogrammed Mantes back to Earth for sale on the international arms market.
- The Mantes are fully sapient. The UN doesn't know how to handle an artificial species that's even more conflict-focused and reason-averse than the Chromatics.
- Hexer data storage devices (and Hexer processors) cause biofeedback in electrokinetics that can drive them insane or kill them.

to have been dead less than a month, which raises the hope that a few may still survive in remote areas. However, the newly dead have all succumbed to disease or malnutrition (Hexer physiology is mostly compatible with local life — but not wholly compatible), so it's apparent that time is running out for any well-hidden survivors. To date, most reported Hexer sightings have turned out to be Mantes, but a few — particularly of smaller, possibly adolescent, specimens — remain unexplained and are cause for sustained hope.

Coequal with Hexer studies is the xenotechnological investigation. While the colony displays no evidence of biotech, Hexers seem to have surpassed humanity in their electronics, optics, and applied physics — in some cases, exceeding even Nova Era developments. The researcher who cracks Hexer data systems will retire wealthy, and the one who unearths Hexer astrographic data will probably launch a first contact expedition. In the meantime, though, the creations of a species that natively thought in base 16 remain impenetrable to even electrokinetic persuasion. Some psions compare this to the headaches (literal and figurative) of using telepathy on Chromatics.

The UN and Æon aren't interested in Hexer tech solely for the patents. The Mantes and the attack ship represent the same, or at least very similar, technology, but more advanced. Their capabilities equal those of the Nova Era's most fearsome autonomous war machines. Moreover, the two ships' interstellar drives are well beyond current human capabilities, as they appear to have used gravitational and inertia reduction in a way that current human physics says is impossible.

The smallest scientific contingent studies Ivdel itself. Under other circumstances, a world so closely resembling early Earth would be a higher priority, but limited resources in the system mean these researchers take a back seat to those invested in more immediate topics. Still, several interesting applications have emerged from these labs, including promising improvements in biotech prosthetic limbs.

## KHOLAT STATION

Gravity, atmospheric pressure, and fallout from the destroyed fission power plants make life on Ivdel an ordeal for neutrals and psions alike. Some psychokinetics can compensate for the gravity and radiation, and biokinetics and vitakinetics can adapt to both these factors and the air, but even the most capable psions stay on the surface for no more than a few weeks at a time. Permanent human habitation in the system hinges on Kholat Station, a modular habitat hung at the Ivdel-Lozva L4 point.

One of humanity's farthest-flung settlements, Kholat Station is dark, dingy, and repair-hungry, thrown together in haste when the urgency of investigating Ivdel became clear. The newest of its interlinked modules were built in the 2080s; none have improved with age. Orgotek is considering new biotech-based modules to supplement, and eventually replace, the older architecture, but this is at least a year out. In the meantime, the air tastes like rust, the inhabitants must import most of their food, and grow the rest in marginally viable hydroponic tanks. Their limited entertainments consist of card games and low-G cat races, and the maintenance staff gets no credit for saving everyone's lives on a weekly basis. Legionnaires who've been to both Kholat and Karroo say Karroo at least has culture and community going for it.

With a communal mission of picking over a planetary mausoleum, the atmosphere on Kholat Station ranges from grim to funereal. The population consists of researchers, troops stationed here against a repeat attack, and the service and support personnel who keep the lights and gravity on. It's a hardship posting, with no provision for dependents and postings limited to six months for obvious psychological reasons. The original explorers are beginning to rotate out, and must hand over unfinished work to untested replacements, a fact that makes many of the scientists furious.

The individual with the task of presiding over this outpost is Dr. Guanyu Zhu, a Chinese xenoethnologist who was a junior member of the Qin first-contact team. Unhappy about his promotion to his present duties, and prone to depression even before Ivdel's scope of destruction became clear, Zhu has handled his administrative duties lackadaisically at best, leaving all but the most critical issues in his operations staff's hands. His incoming replacement, currently serving as his second-in-command, is Dr. Aksinya Markov, a Russian electrokinetic formerly employed as a protoneurologist on the Leviathan program.

Kholat Station's defense commander is Major Sydney McConnell, an Australian Aerospace Force fighter pilot who's turned down multiple offers of psionic activation for fear of letting psi become a substitute for skill. Major McConnell's command, typical of modern UN deployments, is a mixed force: the AAF's No. 6 Squadron and its F-202 hybrid fighters, a company of Chinese infantry detached from the 77th Marine Brigade, the Seventh Legion frigate UNS *Nancy Wheeler*, and the African heavy cruiser UANS *Dakar*.

# RIBHRI

Ribhri means "glimmer" in Thai, and right now the planet is just that — a glimmer of potential, an opportunity waiting for humanity to explore and exploit. Ribhri is one of several potential habitable worlds detected in a recent observatory survey by Changthongkham University in Greater Siam. The survey is up for sale by the Greater Siam government, with several interested parties pitching their bids.

## A STRANGE MIRROR

Ribhri is an example of how strange the galaxy can get. It offers a glimpse of how wildly different Earth could have been, but for a few accidents of cosmological happenstance. The planet is a close mirror to Earth in many ways, orbiting a Sun-like star at roughly the same distance and it's close in size to its distant doppelgänger. Surface conditions nearly

match those of Earth, with an atmosphere similarly rendered breathable by evolving life. Despite the familiarity, though, Ribhri will seem shockingly alien to whichever explorers reach it first.

Ribhri shares its system with eleven other planets in the Prathip system, varying from scorched balls of rock to the lurid cyan and magenta of massive gas giants. These planets are raucous colossi in astronomical terms, hurtling around in a wild array of unusual orbits. Most possess a chaotic retinue of moons and moonlets, and have visible scars from calamitous impacts. One small planet, the vividly viridian and copper-rich Kong, follows a bizarrely long and narrow elliptical orbit around Prathip.

Ribhri itself is a victim of Kessler syndrome. Its low orbit is a veritable minefield of natural debris, spewed out in the wake of the planet's closest moonlet, Sami. Although very small, this 1,100 km in diameter moon follows a preposterously low orbit that immediately catches the attention of any astronomer who witnesses it, shedding large amounts of matter as it goes. Much of the detritus burns up in the atmosphere or spins off into the void, but the moon's nonsensical position keeps the debris coming. A second moon, Phrrya, orbits farther out. The two exert a complex influence on the planet's tides.

The surface of Ribhri is a patina of small landmasses cracked apart by innumerable narrow seas. Permanent land bridges thread between some of the micro-continents, while shallower sea channels tidally drain of water for hours at a time. Fierce currents have worn channels beneath the harder rock, littering coastal regions with rearing arches and hoops of stone draped in sessile native life. Inland, ancient mesas and tent rocks cover the rugged vistas, rising to pinnacles at the heart of each region. Striking mineral formations claw at the sky.

Apart from polar icecaps, the only stain upon this orderly pattern of land and sea is a major impact site in the southern hemisphere. Here, a large and rugged landmass sits amid a wide sea, itself ringed in turn by an island chain at the crater's outer rim. Both the crater region and an area of micro-continents on the opposite side of the planet show higher volcanic activity than elsewhere on Ribhri.

The atmosphere is sometimes hazy with particulates from debris falling out of orbit. Rain is frequent and torrential on Ribhri, cleaning the air but bringing a staining layer of grime down to the land in the process. Rather than flickering exclamations of lightning, storms tend to charge the air and the dust so that innumerable small, snapping, but harmless discharges occur at ground level. Local life forms have adapted to this electrical feast; a storm's approach shines with the glimmering light show of organic luminescence flaring up in its path.

Ribhri's night sky is even more vivid and beautiful, as the gentle lights of avian organisms sit against the backdrop of glimmering auroras stirred by the magnetic distortion of Sami's wake. The constant trickle of de-orbiting debris cuts brief but bright arcs of fire against the firmament, and the sandy light of Phyrra lends the gloom an otherworldly tinge.

## Riches and Ruin

The planet's crust is extremely rich in valuable minerals. In many places, erosion and time have left mineral formations exposed on the surface, creating beautiful grottoes of crystalline growth or strange geometries. This surfeit of substance can even be excessive in places, with pools poisoned by leached chemicals and steaming wetlands too toxic for native life to survive.

The trick for any would-be mining operation, of course, is getting through Ribhri's orbit to reach the planet in the first place. Navigating the detritus isn't impossible, but it's always risky (+3 Difficulty to all Pilot rolls to land or take off from Ribhri). Psionic teleportation is the best option for circumventing the whole mess, but doesn't help with establishing satellites or similarly encircling infrastructure. Cleaning the orbit of rubbish permanently is a futile effort because Sami continues to eject new material, although opening a brief gap could allow for a controlled window of passage or navigation.

Sami itself demands attention. The moonlet, little more than an unusually large asteroid, shouldn't be able to maintain its orbit, and viewing from a distance offers no easy explanation for why it continues to eject material rather than coming apart entirely. It doesn't rotate, and spews debris from the shattered face of its stern. Investigators will need to get close, even land on the moon's prow and approach the shattered area for closer readings.

The truth is that an enormously powerful quantum field is maintaining Sami's position. The field lies within the moonlet, dragging it along and preventing its descent, but the sheer forces involved are cracking it apart on a geological timescale. It's the result of a civilization's last-ditch attempt to save themselves from disaster — an attempt that failed. Sami is the sole monument to their passing.

## PLANETARY DATA: RIBHRI

**Discovery:** Detected in 2123, unvisited by humans
**Distance from Earth:** 2,200 light years
**Star:** Prathip — G2V
**Diameter:** 13,000 km
**Gravity:** 1.05 Earth
**Atmosphere:** Oxygen and nitrogen (breathable)
**Air Pressure:** 0.99 Earth
**Percentage Ocean:** 68%
**Rotation Period:** 25 hours
**Native Life:** Advanced and thriving ecosystem, including dominant puppeteer species

That quantum field makes Sami dangerous ground. Normal humans on its surface risk terrible exposure to quantum flux. In what might seem a strange coincidence to onlookers, anyone mutated by exposure to Sami will follow the same rough pattern of change, flesh budding with delicate fronds and bloating as gaseous sacs inflate within. Even psions face difficulties using their noetic powers on and around the tainted moonlet, which will cause serious problems for any explorers. All of Sami's surface is a Quantum Flux zone. The moon's prow is a Medium QFZ with a Corruption of 4, while the remainder of the moonlet is a Heavy QFZ with a Corruption of 6.

## WEB OF LIFE

The major branches of life on Ribhri have one particularly common trait, the ability to communicate with one another. Each member of the species is a separate individual, but they can share information in ways that are rare on Earth. Almost all species, both predator and prey, motile and sessile possess this trait. Most networks are extremely simple in nature, using nerve-rich appendages and conductive organic fluids to share basic information.

Entire forests of gristle trees can rapidly react to the approach of grazers or bad weather and take protective postures, or even detect the spread of disease through the network and quarantine off the infected. Herd animals link their communication tendrils together while feeding to share their vigil against hunters. Predatory, many-limbed hamadryads bind together to forge strong family packs and to better synchronize their actions when hunting.

The puppeteers are the dominant life form on Ribhri. Puppeteers are highly social naturally psionic herd dwelling animals who all possess strong abilities with electrokinetic Electromanipulation. Members of a single herd regularly combine their powers, just like human psions, and use these combined powers to influence the landscape, exploit other organisms, and even go to war among themselves. Anyone looking to make a new life on Ribhri will have to contend with these creatures, and the prospect that they might even find a way to electrokinetically enhance their intelligence and attain true sapience if given an example to analyze.

### FLESH AND BLOOD

Life on Ribhri has seen a weird reversal of traits associated with plants and animals. The planet's plant analogues paint it in vivid reds, pleasant greens, and shimmering golds, drawing on the wealth of minerals in the soil to create striking hues, but these blood-roses, finger shrubs, and gristle trees are fleshy. They grow around skeletons of spiraling horn and anchor themselves to the ground with nail-like hooks. Many species possess crude sensory organs or even musculature allowing them to adjust to the sun's location, fold vulnerable tissue away from a grazing animal, or in rare cases, uproot entirely and move to a new location.

By comparison, the swift thornelopes, lumbering spine hulks, and predatory hamadryads have cell walls fortified with cellulose and match respiration with some level of photosynthesis. Cactus-like spines are a common form of defense, while dense

tissues and sticky internal fluids allow an animal to survive even heavy damage if its core nervous system survives intact. Many continue to grow throughout their lives; elder spine hulks can reach massive sizes. Large numbers of limbs are common, arranged into sets of three and easily supported by the existing neurological complexity needed to form inter-organism networks.

Similar creatures wallow in the seas, but a very different evolutionary branch rules the skies. Wafting colony animals drift through the air, glimmering with bioluminescence. They fly via gas sacs, rippling flight organs, and gossamer sail-fins. Some drape stinging fronds down to catch small prey or drink fluids from the bone-cups and meat-flowers of the plants. A rare few species are massive leviathans of the firmament, slowly migrating between micro-continents and inhaling smaller avian life into their lung-stomachs. Heavy rainstorms can briefly force the aerial host to land; several otherwise herbivorous ground species take advantage of such a bounty of vulnerable food.

While human and Ribhri biologies are relatively compatible, a settler would face difficulties living off the land here. Many organisms contain higher concentrations of various minerals than a human can easily tolerate, so would require some level of processing to render edible. Despite this, very few plants or animals are genuinely poisonous, and the use of venom in Ribhri's ecology is rare outside of avian life forms.

## THE PUPPETEERS

Ribhri is no longer home to sapient life, but the omnivorous puppeteers are the closest the planet has to offer. They're a noetically active species, forming highly social colonies of several dozen members capable of combining their psionic abilities. While most puppeteers are no more intelligent than a monkey or raccoon, they can temporarily enhance their intelligence to equal that of Earthly great apes.

Puppeteer bodies are two to three meters long, and armored in a bark-like carapace with spines bristling from the gaps between plates. Bioluminescent striations mark the flanks, providing a crude means of communication but also displaying patterns unique to each herd. Puppeteers have nine limbs in three rows; the front three sport broad, long claws for carving deep enough through prey's tough flesh to cut into nerves. A puppeteer can rear its forebody up, resting on the rear six limbs like a centaur to get

a better view of its surroundings with the sensory organs that ring its head-trunk and grinding mandibles.

The crucial neural connection retracts beneath the mouth parts, protected from damage. This bundle of filaments, coated in sappy mucus, allows the puppeteer to connect quickly with its fellows and form a network. However, puppeteers also possess a capacity that they only share with a few parasitic organisms on Ribhri — they can interface with other species too.

Puppeteers have a natural and potent psionic capability for Electromanipulation. Puppeteers use Electromanipulation to boost their own connections to one another, to enhance their individual processing bandwidth, and to sense and overwhelm prey or, in some cases, to link to other species and directly seize control of their bodies.

### PUPPETEER (MEDIUM THREAT)

**Primary Pool:** 7 (pack hunter)

**Secondary Pool:** 5 (clever problem solver)

**Desperation Pool:** 3

**Enhancement:** 1

**Defense:** 3

**Health:** 4

**Edges:** Danger Sense, Hardy 1, Lightning Calculator, Small Unit Tactics, Swift

**Psi Trait:** 2

**Psi Modes:** Electromanipulation 4

**Equipment Bonuses:** +0

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Incredible Resilience:** Puppeteers' resilient alien biology ignores two levels of penalty from any Injury Complication.
- **Natural Armor:** The puppeteer's tough, bark exterior gives it one level each of both hard and soft armor.
- **Neural Connection:** Puppeteers in direct physical contact with one another, or with other native life of Ribhri, possess a Psionic Connection for the purposes of using Electromanipulation on the target life form.
- **Talons:** Puppeteers sport powerful claws evolved to deal with the resilient biologies of native Ribhri life-forms. These weapons possess the Brutal, Deadly, Grapple, Melee, Quality 2, and Piercing tags.

## PUPPETEER SOCIETY

The species lacks many of the traits humanity associates with civilization. Puppeteers have no true language, they do not practice agriculture, and they rarely make use of anything a human would recognize as a tool. However, their ability to enhance their intelligence and to communicate are powerful tools. Individuals can analyze patterns of foraging to avoid exhausting food supplies, examine the environment for signs of danger or opportunity, and swiftly share this information with other members of their herd.

Puppeteers can use Electromanipulation to take control of other organisms, and the particular patterns by which they employ this ability vary from one region to another. Some herds have learned to force gristle-trees to entangle their limbs and form protected groves where the puppeteer can sleep unmolested. In the tropical ring-islands around the southern impact crater, puppeteers induce bloated spine hulks to empty their glands of mineral-rich

### QUANTUM SKIES

It's extremely unusual for both quantum and noetic powers to develop on the same planet, let alone in the same species as has occurred with humanity. Ribhri doesn't offer much of a parallel to the human situation, though. The planet's modern aerial evolutionary branch split off from the rest of Ribhri's native life at a very early stage, long before they even took to the skies. That they still share the networking traits with so many organisms on the planet may be the result of convergent evolution, or some early pressure of fitness that selected for such communal connections during the most basic stages of life's formation.

Puppeteers possess no affinity for the quantum power that once ruled their skies, and will never produce an equivalent to humanity's novas.

nectar, providing them with nutritional elements otherwise hard to find on the island chains. They can even temporarily animate dead creatures via Electromanipulation. They use this ability to protect their herd, or to have prey carcasses move themselves somewhere more convenient for feeding.

Puppeteers also use this capacity in war. Herds are territorial and will often conflict with nearby rivals, but while these struggles sometimes result in death, colony members endeavor to subdue hostile combatants and drag them back as prisoners. A victorious puppeteer then electrokinetically hacks the captive via a forced neural link, subverting its allegiance to its new herd. Combined with the propensity of large herds to break apart into smaller groups, this behavior mixes the population and maintains genetic diversity.

Puppeteers are intelligent, even inquisitive. Despite having voluminous brainpower, however, they're at a stage of development and awareness closer to that of a higher primate on Earth. In theory, they may develop real sapience over the coming millennia, although the form it takes will be that of the greater, emergent consciousness of a networked group rather than as separate individuals. If exposed to a catalyst like humanity, though, it's possible puppeteer development could move forward at a faster pace.

## Those Who Stopped Sami

True sapience has emerged on Ribhri once before. Millions of years ago, a civilization ruled over the planet's fractured lands and bright skies, dominating the planet and its ecosystems.

These precursors evolved from among Ribhri's aerial predators, forming tight-knit sky-clans based on the biological networking of family units. Soon after forming their first true cultures, the species saw the eruption of quantum abilities among their number. The native equivalent of novas, these individuals almost uniformly possessed power over the manipulation of gravity and weather, networking together to form a ruling caste that dominated history for several millennia. They expanded across the planet, raised up floating structures into the atmosphere, fought wars with weaponized weather patterns, and wove their deepest cultural beliefs and neuroses into songs echoing across the world's firmament.

Despite taming nature and becoming masters of all they surveyed, these aerial natives died in an extinction event that killed ninety percent of all life on the planet. It came in the form of Sami, a terrifying harbinger of destruction that hurtled out of the void of space. Solipsistic and inward-looking, the sky-clans had no warning until their final days. Lacking other tools to protect themselves, the ruling caste came together in a grand interlinking and turned their quantum powers against Sami in concert. They tried to divert its terrible approach.

Incredibly, they were successful — to a point. While the Ribhri rulers were not as powerful as the mightiest human novas, they could link their powers together in a way that no human Aberrant could, and together the species generated a quantum field so potent that it yanked Sami aside into orbit, halting its advance. However, the sheer stress of this sudden diversion was too much, and a huge amount of Sami's mass simply tore away, plunging to planetfall in a calamitous stream of kinetic impacts.

The sky-clans perished. A few surviving novas attempted to escape in the civilization's final moments; the rest just died, physically at least. Their great work survived them, though — an awe-inspiring application of quantum power persisting to this day, holding Sami aloft even as it continues to slowly crumble away.

### Works Erased

The sheer passage of time has obliterated almost every other element of the sky-clans existence. Millions of years have allowed life to recover and entirely new organisms to replace those lost. Even floating sky-islands that fell to earth as their masters died are now almost untraceable, little more than a hill here or an ancient chasm there.

The fossil record retains almost nothing of the sky-clans, as they were entirely soft-bodied beings of luminescent fronds and pulsating sacs. Some of the most cunning aerial predators are distant relatives of those who once ruled the skies, but they remain mere animals. Ironically, the puppeteers are themselves a lingering legacy. The sky-clans selectively bred their ancestors to act as servant animals, much like humans have bred dogs. The direct effects of that selective breeding are long since overturned by entire epochs of evolution, but it may well have helped set the puppeteers on the path towards their modern-day dominance.

It is in Sami that the last true monument to the sky-clans remains. It's an obvious sign that something happened here on Ribhri, something that

astrophysicists can't explain as any sort of natural processes. More than that, though, the quantum-wielding rulers of Ribhri left something of themselves behind. A portion of their own networked minds persists within the quantum field of Sami. Whether this was an intentional attempt to survive the devastation in a post-physical form, or simply an imprint created by the mass death of their species, an awareness of sorts still roils in the moonlet's heart.

A telepath willing to make direct contact with Sami could potentially tap into that fragmented consciousness. Doing so would be incredibly dangerous, exposing the psion's own mind to a network of broken minds that, even as a mere echo, vastly overshadows the sparking sentience of a single human mind. This utterly alien cognizance remains trapped within its own ruined nature, unable to see beyond the intense purpose instilled into it by the sky-clan network and locked into utter trauma by the expiration of its living membership. Unless disturbed, it is simply incapable of looking beyond itself or acting on its own initiative. If it notices a telepathic intrusion, the echo is unlikely to react well.

A telepath who can brave the madness of a dead species and the overloading corruption of the quantum field to find some sort of common ground, however, faces the opportunity of a lifetime. The sky-clans don't want to be forgotten and dead; the collective mind will eagerly, even desperately, try to impart something of their history and existence to such newcomer life forms. If roused to something resembling clarity of thought, they will hold on to the hope that some of the novas escaped to other worlds. So too might they be convinced to exert a final effort and push Sami out of Ribhri's orbit entirely, although the exertion would exhaust the quantum field entirely in the process and finally kill the species' legacy for good.

Then again, a mishandled contact could rouse the wrath of these dead thoughts. Armed with a quantum field of unfathomable power, and possessing a zealous desire to protect Ribhri, the sky-clans' last echo could prove a source of utter devastation for those who would intrude on their world. Worse yet, the quantum ghosts might recreate a twisted parody of their own people, warping human victims into increasingly alien sub-Aberrant mutants.

# SCREAM

Two months ago, a strident signal emerged from the background static of space. This quantum howl, ululating in strange frequencies, prompted baffling and fearful clairsentient reports of a whole world screaming into the cold dark. One month ago, Upeo wa Macho psions teleported into the system where the signal originates, and came face-to-face with its shocking source. Now, despite a strict quarantine on the system, the planet known as Scream is a media sensation. Conspiracy theories, lurid fiction, and wild speculation surround the planet's quantum signal and its nightmare landscape.

Scream is a world devoured by technology. Jumbled computational monoliths reach out of the atmosphere. Seas roil in lurid hues of coolant fluid and smart liquids. Immense chasms plunge down through the planet's crust to suckle at the heat beneath. Even the local wildlife now serves as organic information processors. Colonies of humans survive and even thrive amid this technology run amok, despite having been cut off from Earth for almost 70 years.

## THE DEVOURING

When the first colonists stepped onto Scream's surface in 2045, they saw rolling plains and grand mountain ranges painted in the ocher, umber, and violet colors of the native plant and fungus analogues. In those days, they called it New Opportunity, and it reflected the optimism of these initial human settlers. Most were the cultists and followers of the Crucible, a nova matter-manipulator who preached a transhuman destiny for the species, but many just sought a new life through the portal opened by one of the Crucible's companions. Tens of thousands arrived on an alien world that, initially, seemed a welcoming paradise.

The Crucible and his nova disciples chose the planet as a colony site because they believed it bore the signs of alien terraforming. The novas hoped to find traces of whatever planet-sculpting technology the effort would have required, and to exploit it to further the Crucible's own ideology. Once they had helped construct an initial ring of settlements around the equatorial zone, the novas began to carefully search the planet. They found a prize far beyond what they had imagined.

Colossal machines lay buried in both polar regions. These high-tech, self-assembling factories likely arrived by probe, constructing themselves and then shaping New Opportunity into a hospitable environment on a timescale dwarfing the efforts of humanity. Yet the intended benefactors never showed up. The world lay abandoned.

The Crucible and his disciples plundered this trove of technology, and initiated a radical transformation that would overtake the whole planet. Over the next thirty years, a fusion of Aberrant and alien science violated the landscape. A creeping wave of assimilation and reconstruction spread from the poles, snowballing relentlessly as it absorbed more matter and grew ever more complex. Streams of nanomachinery tore down mountains and rebuilt them into quantum computers. Immense pumps drank down the seas, then vomited them back up, transformed. Cancerous strata of conduits and capacitors wormed beneath the surface. Fungi became neural networks oozing in the spaces between data-crystals, trees became emitters with ceramic-shod branches and shining thread-leaves.

Several novas briefly reappeared, offering little explanation as they ushered three-quarters of the human population into new structures emerging from the landscape. These victims emerged as sub-Aberrant mutants, the dutiful servants that the survivors called Caretakers. The novas simply abandoned the remaining colonists, marooning them on the machine world. However, humans are exceedingly adaptable.

## THE QUARANTINE

Like the Nova Era colony of Eden, Scream remains under quarantine. Unlike Eden, the planet is not a particularly well-kept secret. News of the quantum emanations rapidly spread through the various scientific institutions who detected the signal, and the investigation leaks like a sieve. The UN dithers for now, uncertain as to how to proceed.

The state of Scream frightens every organization closely involved in the matter. It is seemingly carnivorous in attitude towards its own moons, having caught them in writhing tendrils of disassembly infrastructure. Its screaming emissions are fiercer in close proximity, a full-spectrum bombardment that causes havoc in non-shielded systems. Scream hails any vessel coming close across all frequencies using recognizably human digital signatures but which resolve into nightmarish, garbled screaming. Deeply concerned about possible infection by Aberrant or alien electronic warfare, the UN

## PLANETARY DATA: SCREAM

**Founded:** 2045 (Nova colonists)
**Discovery:** 2045 (Aberrant discovery)
**Rediscovered:** 2123 (UN investigative team)
**Distance from Earth:** 3,600 light years
**Star:** Watcher — F2
**Diameter:** 7,000 km
**Gravity:** 0.91 Earth
**Atmosphere:** Oxygen and nitrogen (breathable)
**Air Pressure:** 0.95 Earth
**Temperature:** Unknown range due to planetary machinery
**Percentage Ocean:** 44% (coolant seas)
**Rotation Period:** 22 hours
**Native Life:** Some surviving forms of advanced flora and fauna
**Human Population:** 297,000 humans, plus unknown (but large) number of sub-Aberrant mutants

has not allowed anyone close to Scream since the first team arrived a month ago.

As such, the quarantine is more theoretical than physical, because neither the UN nor the Legion are willing to risk vessels in an engagement of cyber-warfare with a literally planet-sized computer. Watch Post Sigma is a hastily assembled platform at the very edge of the system, and clairsentient psions work in shifts to maintain vigil over the outer reaches and surrounding space, but if a vessel jumps in close to Scream there's very little the quarantine forces can or will do to stop them.

Æon Trinity scientists work round the clock on new designs to harden ship systems against the Scream scream-spectrum, while data specialists analyze the planet's communications for viruses or signs of Aberrant Corruption. Understanding of what Scream is remains limited for now — an alien construction, Aberrant power runs wild, both, or something even stranger. What is clear is that something within the planet has changed to trigger its recent wailing call. The upper echelons of the UN fear what this may imply.

For now, the OpNet runs wild with imaginative features like Planet of the Killer Machines, and Aberrant cultists meet to whisper of a world remade in an Aberrant's image. Whether promised land or world of nightmares, Scream exerts a grim fascination.

## PLANETSIDE

Down on Scream's surface, its inhabitants have little notion of the panicked reaction on Earth. They survive as they have for decades, dwelling in the nooks and crannies of a colossal machine that has made space for their existence but otherwise pays them little heed. The colonists exploit that disregard, harnessing Scream's power for their own purposes as they seek to become masters of their home-in-exile.

The planet's old surface still breaks through in places: a tilted range of mountains here, a stretch of plain now stained with caustic run-off there. Everything else is gone beneath the landscape of black composite and glowing neon. Jungles of bio-engineered computer-trees fill steel chasms and cluster around pools of ferromagnetic fluid. Immense gears roll along world-circling paths. Mechanical avenues shift into new patterns, while glutinous masses of rainbow ooze periodically scour drainage canals clean. Vast structures reconfigure themselves in accordance with unknown principles.

Gravity is slightly lower than that of Earth, and the air somewhat thinner — but neither as much as they should be, given Scream's small size. Planetary control systems curate the weather, usually offering a dreamy haze of opalescent cloud cover. Brief storms of static earth their power down through

orbital beanstalks. The real problem for the colonists is the backwash from the planet's emanations into the void, strong enough to scramble all long-range wireless communications.

Three of the original colonies survive in the equatorial region, spared by the terraforming tide. The cities of Prosperidad, Innovatión, and Potenzial are ramshackle, vibrant hubs of life where crumbling colonial structures buttress up against new fabrications thieved from Scream's mechanical processes. Beyond the equator, new settlements form from the landscape without request. If enough humans gather in one spot, the planet reacts by initiating the needed infrastructure: purification engines to produce clear water and nutrient blocks, and shifting substrate to create or collapse chambers for the population as needed. The planet provides humans with what they need to survive, but it's a poor reward for toil or devotion; marooned on a technological tomb, offered alms by an otherwise uncaring world.

Betrayed by the Crucible, the people of Scream look to hew their independence from the world's iron hide. Tough, practical, and clever, they scavenge and hack Scream's systems to hijack what they need. Technical knowledge is highly prized and carefully preserved, even if they must jury-rig most of their relatively crude technology. Decades of cracking the planet's systems has given survivors the skills to subvert massive fabricators, realign river-pipes and chasm-conveyors to maintain links between the colonies, and even create their own crude mimicry of an OpNet, albeit woefully unreliable due to Scream's interference.

The major communities of Scream see the Aberrants who abandoned them as traitors and charlatans, worthy of nothing more than disdain and hatred. A few bands of loyalist hold-outs remain, exiled to the mechanical wilderness where they pray to the Crucible and wait obediently for the uplifting that the nova promised would come. Matters became complicated in the last decade, however, after several new Aberrants erupted in the population. Those who cannot hide what they are face expulsion or execution. One exiled Divergent, Jeune Emery, rallies cultists under her banner claiming she is the Crucible's chosen prophet, come to usher the true faithful to their reward.

## THE BLIND BEHEMOTH

It is abundantly clear to the colonists that the world-engine either does not or cannot pay much heed to their activities. Most believe the Crucible and the other novas used the world to uplift themselves in line with the Crucible's ideology, merging with the machinery. If so, they either reached a higher state where petty physical concerns no longer distract them, or they destroyed themselves. Scream does nothing new, nothing to progress itself. It runs through the same routines with no end goal, as errors and flaws creep in around the edges. This is a dumb beast of a device — colossal, yes, and capable of maintaining billions of subsystems on a planetary scale, but fundamentally unintelligent.

Despite this, the colonists do not truly understand the bizarre coalescence of Aberrant and alien technology. They can confuse and deceive Scream's machines, but they cannot rebuild or operate the devices without subverting the planet's systems. The same will likely be true for scientists and engineers from Earth, should they ever touch down on the planet. Scream operates on principles that remain beyond the reach of modern understanding.

Most of the original population became sub-Aberrant mutants fifty years ago, remade as the faceless legions of the Caretakers. They're as mindless as the planet. Caretakers appear sufficiently inhuman as to appear to be an alien species, with an off-white carapace somewhere between the chitin of an insect and the varnished gleam of a high-end minicomp. Each has a unique identification pattern printed on its smooth and otherwise featureless face-plate. The forearms split into smaller limbs and specialized interfacing digits, while the legs similarly fork below the knee. The whole body is slung forward, spine arched in a back-breaking curve.

Caretakers are passive, clicking and clattering around the planet's surface to tend its machinery. While they might work alone or come in teams of a thousand strong, a survivor can push a Caretaker over and steal its tools while expecting no retaliation; the mutant will simply seek to resupply itself at the next opportunity. The human inhabitants treasure face-plates from dead Caretakers, because their printed codes are essentially passkeys for many of the planet's systems, but colonists have a lingering cultural taboo against actually killing Caretakers to steal such because, ultimately, they're born from human tragedy. Caretaker numbers remain constant, and rumors persist of a factory under the north pole creating more mutants via cloning from still-imprisoned victims.

Ghouls are the other side of the coin. They're rogue mutants, maintenance-turned-murderer. In

the early years, they were thankfully rare, but since the planet has begun to scream at the stars, more and more Caretakers turn to charnel madness. These ferals are less clean than a normal Caretaker, carapace cracked and haunches smeared in effluent or dried gore.

Ghouls are hungry creatures, craving sustenance in a world that offers little. A ghoul's face-plate cracks to reveal a jagged mouth beneath, and the things cannibalize Caretakers, infest feeding and repair facilities that normally support the mutants, and even attack colonists. Scream does little to stamp them out. Caretakers flee; infested facilities shut down. This just pushes the ghouls onward in search of new prey.

## BREAKDOWN

The Scream situation is unstable, a puzzle that literally cries out for a solution. Interest in the planet and its potential treasures grows, and will eventually outweigh the fear — especially once the Æon Trinity is able to confirm reports of survivors on the surface. Meanwhile, the planet's song marks the descent of its systems into chaos, the beginning of a breakdown.

### QUARANTINE BREACH

The Crucible left a legacy behind on Earth. The Aberrant cult known as the Magnum Opus waned over the decades, but now sees a revival. Based off surviving copies of the nova's philosophical beliefs, the cult thinks Scream may be his final destination, a mechanical utopia in which he would uplift all his followers to a higher state of being. Now, they want in on this post-human paradise themselves. With wealthy backers keen to overcome the limits of their own mortality, the Magnum Opus has furnished a spacecraft ready to take the faithful to their promised land. All they need is a renegade or corrupt teleporter willing to transport them to Scream in return for a very significant payoff.

Meanwhile the Prentice Group, an FSA conglomerate, already has the needed renegade psions on hand for an expedition to Scream's surface. They fully expect Scream to bombard their expedition with information warfare; indeed, they're counting on it. Company scientists are preparing systems to capture and isolate viruses and intrusion measures on the brief "fishing trip," so the infected technology can then return to a secure, hardened R&D lab on Earth. They hope to be able to analyze the planet's output, and use it to potentially develop a new line of military-grade products. Like the UN, the Prentice Group waits for the first prototypes to be ready: they'll launch their expedition soon. They already have a pilot, Simon "Flatliner" Jones, a teleporter sufficiently amoral that he left Upeo wa Macho to avoid being expelled.

One tiny team is about to leave the rest on the starting line. A pair of renegade psions, a clairsentient and teleporter working in tandem, intends to travel to Scream any day now. Carnival and Bleak, as their nicknames go, are in it for the thrill. The two young psions are actually sisters named Isabel and Fiona Wang. They possess incredible power that lets them travel wherever they desire and, without the yoke of authority, they're free to do so as they see fit. The duo think Scream is a giant alien machine and want to talk to it, so they're bringing high-grade minicomps and a whole lot of optimism. Carnival thinks they should find an electrokinetic who might help, and backers to loan them a hybrid spacecraft so they can teleport into orbit, but Bleak just wants to get going so they can win the title of first humans on the Planet of the Killer Machines, just like in the videos.

The UN's fears are true: Scream attempts to infiltrate human systems with a slate of viruses. The planet's systems aren't malign, just mindlessly following protocols. The viruses are highly disruptive but not actively homicidal in their current configuration, but anyone returning from the machine-world risks bringing back a payload of Aberrant cyber-warfare. The settlers have long since figured out how to deal with the subversion programs and can trivially handle the worst the planetary systems throw at them, but without their expertise such an outbreak could easily create an epidemic of rogue technology.

## STARSONG

Scream's shriek grows louder as the months pass. The best analysis from the Æon Trinity's labs thus far is that Aberrant technology in the world's strange engines powers the transmissions, a spasmodic squealing marking a fundamental shift in what the planet is doing. For decades, Scream has presumably been functioning as its creators intended, so the scream is either a catastrophic error or a change in purpose.

The Qin have confirmed their detection of the planet's song, and taken heed of humanity's warning to steer clear. However, the UN cannot predict what other powers may take notice of the signal. They fear the arrival of unknown aliens, or that the quantum

emissions will draw the attention of Aberrants. For now, the planet appears to have picked up the equally bizarre emanations of Crèche (p. XX), and is focusing its own energy output towards that celestial anomaly. When that fails to draw a meaningful response, will Scream shout out to other cosmological phenomena, or shut down entirely?

Isolated, the colonists soldier on. They've noticed the planet's systems going awry over the last few months, as new structures rise from the ground to amplify its interstellar emissions. Strange new code threads through Scream's systems. Jeune Emery's followers spread propaganda, declaring the Crucible's return is nigh. Scientists in the equatorial city of Prosperidad believe otherwise. They think ancient safeguards in the terraforming engines have finally triggered, and the planet is reconfiguring itself as a warning to whatever alien minds may have dispatched the probes here in the first place. Given the sweeping passage of time, those minds likely no longer exist. Still, Scream's clarion call echoes through space, a stark signal for whoever might care to listen.

# SKETE

The Upeo wa Macho spent six years in hiding, jaunting between worlds on the fringes of human exploration and maintaining contact between colonies where they could. In the interval, they continued to expand the frontier, discovering new worlds, and cataloguing them in the hopes that one day, they might be able to share what they'd learned with the rest of humanity — and indeed, when they returned in 2122, they did. They only scrubbed one system from the public release, not by the Upeo's request, but at the request of the people they'd found there — the Listeners. Hiding away on their homeworld, keeping themselves secret by suppressing the effects of their psionic society, the Upeo thought it was random chance that led them to the Listeners. No such luck — the Listeners allowed them in.

## THE WORLD

Skete is a large, wet world littered with archipelagoes and a single "continent," roughly the size of Texas, where the majority of Listener industry is located. Listener construction occupies virtually every square inch of this continent, often spilling out into the tidal zone and across sandbars. Many of the halo of atolls surrounding the primary continent are artificial in nature, coaxed into growing decades or centuries before the Listeners would need them. Beyond the continental shelf, which extends for thousands of miles of shallows before plunging into the deep, the pelagic ocean is a chaotic swarm of life, from algae mats to enormous grazers to sleek predators.

Most complex life on Skete is radially symmetrical — only a few species of plankton and a clade of their predatory evolutionary cousins display bilateral symmetry, though most pelagic life has adopted a streamlined form that casual observers could easily be mistake for bilateral symmetry. The vast majority of that life is what human scientists would classify as animal, with even autotrophic life displaying motility and limited aerobic respiration. Only a few key species of algae and kelp are completely photosynthetic, producing the surfeit of oxygen in Skete's atmosphere. Despite being a minority taxonomically, however, these few species represent far more biomass than every other species on Skete put together, and in the light of day the ocean is a rich, verdant green instead of Earth's blue.

Skete's atmosphere is nearly 35 percent oxygen, and consequently it is dangerous for humans and most other forms of Terran life to breathe. A simple filter can easily remove the excess oxygen, but hardtech filters quickly become saturated, and so most humans stationed on this world prefer either biotech filters (p. XX) or full breather masks for long-term exposure. Residents also recommend sunglasses to counter glare from water, as most life on Skete does not have sufficiently developed eyes for this to be a concern in Listener construction.

Listener cities are colorful, glossy constructions of chitin and land coral, artfully induced to grow into useful forms. Most buildings, and therefore most cities, are immaculately planned decades before they're ready to use. For short-term or immediate need, Listeners traditionally cemented discarded shells and chitin from food species into thin but sturdy walls. This was also their most frequent means of constructing weapons or tools, but since the advent of an industrial society, Listeners have largely replaced both of these traditional art styles with mass production. Today, only dedicated monastic orders interested in cultural preservation still practice

## PLANETARY DATA: SKETE

**Founded:** 2122 (Joint United Nations and Æon Trinity Embassy)
**Discovery:** 2119 (Upeo wa Macho survey)
**Distance from Earth:** 47,534 light years
**Star:** Nous — K0V
**Diameter:** 13,400 km
**Gravity:** 0.89 Earth
**Atmosphere:** Oxygen and Nitrogen (toxic levels of oxygen for humans)
**Air Pressure:** 1.8 Earth
**Temperature:** 5º C to 40º C
**Percentage Ocean:** 89%
**Rotation Period:** 28 hours
**Native Life:** Complex biosphere; pentameric radial symmetry dominates
**Human Population:** 2,500

these techniques. Of the traditional styles, they only still practice building cultivation, because Listeners have never managed to produce an artificial coral that feels or tastes the same as the genuine article.

## NATIVE LIFE

Listeners confine the majority of their activities to the surface and the continental shelf, and in these areas wildlife is either tightly controlled or else has been more or less domesticated for Listener uses. With most dry land given over to industrial use, only a few parks and greenbelts exist to preserve strictly surface flora and fauna. The Listeners perform the lion's share of their agriculture and animal husbandry in the tidal zones. Fields of domesticated bivalve-analogues, swollen far beyond the confines of their vestigial shells, compete with pens of scuttling bottom-feeders for space in the near intertidal zone; further out to sea are enormous mats of kelp and algae that workers carve up and ship to the coast.

Beyond the carefully maintained habitat of the civilized continental shelf, thick algae blankets block out much of Nous' light within the first few meters, leaving the sea below a pitch-black void only occasionally penetrated by beams of sunlight or illuminated by brilliant bioluminescent creatures. Listeners have little interest in these depths save as a source of potentially useful genetic material, as they psionically plumbed them ages ago and no longer engage in risky fishing practices for reasons of environmental stability.

### THE LISTENERS

Listeners evolved from ambush predators in the shallow benthic zone of Skete's oceans. Standing little more than a meter tall and twice as broad at the furthest extent of their five legs, overlapping chitinous plates cover their dorsal side and thick, rippling cilia carpet their ventral side. Each leg ends in five radiating "fingers," dexterous grasping tentacles a few inches long, typically held in a curved-inward posture behind their chitin "foot" unless in use. On the ventral side of their body is an enormous mouth, behind which lies a multi-chambered stomach. Listeners distend the central chamber and engulf their food with it, partially digesting it before retracting their stomach to swallow. Listeners are amphibious, and can breathe water as easily as air.

The center of the Listener body bulges upward, housing their complex system of stomachs and lungs. Five glassy lenses, recessed between their legs, give them vision in a 360-degree arc, however, their eyes are fairly primitive by comparison to the human eye, and they possess limited visual acuity, which is better at distinguishing motion and color than

## EXPLORATION LOG #08433, AUGUST 11TH, 2119 (MACHINE TRANSCRIPTION)

**FYODOROV:** Okay, mission recorder's on. Everyone good to go?
**OTIENO:** Seals read green, pack's secure. No time like the present.
**SAVEA:** I've got a good feeling about this jump.
**FYODOROV:** You always say that, Leilani. You said that about the planet with the radioactive fungus! Have you ever had a bad feeling about a jump?
**SAVEA:** If I did, would you want me to tell you?
**OTIENO:** Let's just go, Arkady.
**FYODOROV:** Right, right. This is going to be a long one, so hold on.
[DISCONTINUITY CONSISTENT WITH TRANSLOCATION]
**FYODOROV:** Whew, okay, here we — oh my God.
**SUIT AGENT:** Warning: Oxygen hazard. Warning: Oxygen hazard. Warning—
**OTIENTO:** Stupid thing, the seals are still — holy shit. Those must be two hundred meters tall at least! Biological?
**FYODOROV:** Not all of it, look, that's metal.
**ENTITY A:** [unintelligible]
**FYODOROV:** [unintelligible, agitated]
**SAVEA:** Oh wow.
**OTIENO:** Wait wait wait! I think—
**ENTITY A:** [unintelligible]
**FYODOROV:** Okay, is it just me, or did one of the giant alien crabs just try to say "Hello?"
**OTIENO:** It's not just you. Let me try to make contact.
**SAVEA:** See, Arkady? I told you I had a good feeling about this jump.

silhouettes or shapes. In addition to their primary eyes, their legs also possess eyespots that are capable of distinguishing between light and dark. While they can hear, their ears primarily perceive lower tones — human voices are just at the limit of their perception. Their sense of touch, taste, and smell are, by comparison, much more sensitive, particularly in the cilia and fingers at the ends of their legs.

Listeners are capable of both sexual and asexual reproduction. Severed legs can, with proper care, grow into an entirely new Listener, though this requires a significant investment of resources and attention for several years before the Listener will be independent enough to think and fend for itself. Listeners have five different variations of sexual organs, and most Listeners possess all five, one per leg, all of which are necessary to successfully fertilize eggs and carry them from conception to birth. One such leg carries the gestating eggs, which typically number in the thousands, until they're ready to hatch, at which point the Listener (if not already in the water) deposits them into the ocean. Predators devour most larval Listeners before they grow large enough to wade back onto land, where specialists will adopt and educate the young Listeners in a creche.

A significant minority of Listeners, about 30 percent, possess duplicates of one or more sex organs in place of others, and a rare subset of that minority possess three or more of a single type. One in 100,000 have four of a kind — one in ten million, five of a kind. This math is complicated by the fact that Listeners can regrow severed legs, and regrown legs will not always develop a like sex organ. Listeners consider each possible combination to be its own gender, and many Listeners will transition between two or three over the course of their lives.

Listeners communicate through several methods, favoring a tactile language of cilia and fingers, with legs gently touching. They are also capable of oral communication by inflating the central chamber of their stomach and flexing their mouth like a set

## PRONOUNS?

Given the profusion of possible genders they can possess (even though many of them are very rare), it is perhaps unsurprising that Listeners do not employ gendered pronouns, and apart from some traditionalists do not ascribe much meaning to gender in any case. Consequently, English-language sources on Listeners employ non-gendered Spivak pronouns: e/em/eirs.

of vocal cords, but this style of speech is extremely loud and usually only used when two Listeners cannot touch to communicate — or when speaking with aliens that prefer verbal communication. Listener's thunderous, unmodulated speech often startles humans who are unaccustomed to their voices. The tactile language operates according to a grammar that tolerates simultaneous independent statements, with different branches of cilia and fingers communicating separate concepts which Listeners often use to buttress or clarify a central idea. In writing, this language resembles the tracks of worm-eaten wood, though this is often only a shorthand, with the actual meaning typically encoded into the noetic template of the material itself save in banners, signs, and the like.

Listeners possess highly decentralized brains, distributed in a ring around their core and extending into their legs in a series of highly plastic neural cysts. Their cognition is complex and difficult for humans to interpret — all attempts to use Telepathy on a Listener imposes a level 5 Complication, unless the Listener is actively cooperating, in which case reduce the Complication to 3. Listeners who lose a leg often display psychological or personality shifts, although this loss only rarely causes serious deficits, and in such cases, regrowth resolves these problems.

### LISTENER SOCIETY

Listener society is a gnostic theocracy, with monastic orders of powerful clairsentients wielding temporal power by virtue of their enhanced insight. In the past, these orders warred between each other, both due to conflicting predictions as well as purely political concerns. Both because of the nature of clairsentience and their ambush-predator psychology, these wars tended to be extremely brief and violent, usually beginning and ending with a single overwhelming attack. Following the development of industry, itself a fraught process as more than one monastic order declared that it could potentially destroy the environment, the specter of mechanized warfare quickly made future conflict undesirable by all. This led directly to the development of a peaceful and pluralistic system of inter-monastic governance, with insights shared, compared, and thoroughly investigated. This system of government has continued for over 700 years, and persists through the modern day.

Listeners affiliate with one another not in lines of genetic descent, but upon similar interests, close friendships, and of course shared faith, blending the aspects of the human concepts of "family," "workers' collective," and "religious commune." These groups exist within the larger framework of monastic government, with one order typically overseeing a region on behalf of the larger monastic collective. On the macro- and micro-scale economy, Listeners possess a centrally planned economy — indeed, the concept of a non-planned economy leaves Listeners slightly anxious. Of course, a species with widespread Psychocognition find planning for the future to be relatively easy.

Listeners live in a society slightly less technologically advanced than humanity. They are cautious by nature and only act after they have exhaustively investigated an issue. As a result, they've been at this relative level of advancement for nearly 200 years with only slight incremental progress. As they conduct virtually all their space exploration through clairsentience, their space travel capability is practically non-existent, limited to probes roughly on par with Earth's own late century. Their biotech is somewhat more advanced, as Listeners are adept at genetic engineering, but have limited development both due to concerns over potential biosphere contamination and an ongoing ethical debate over creating life incapable of evolving to gnostic awareness. Most monastic Listeners are not particularly concerned with technological progress, save monitoring it to prevent upheaval or danger to the entire species, because their mind's eye is ever focused on the stars, and as the monastic government is responsible for the planning of the economy, technological innovation is only

prioritized when it might lead to advances in understanding of the nature of the universe.

Religion, for the Listeners, has virtually always been discovery and knowledge. Early Listeners cast their minds at the sky, hoping to speak with the gods who looked down upon them each night, baffled by the airless void that seemed to stretch on forever to bar the way. Later, as the faithful laid down strictures and practices to develop their minds, their skills increased, and they have extended their sight ever outward since, exploring the planets in their own solar system before reaching outwards yet again. Understanding the universe remains the primary motivation of their culture, and while all Listeners now know that the stars are not gods but enormous fusion reactions, most remain quietly confident that when they finally reach to the edge of the universe itself and plumb the depths of time before time itself, they will find their gods hiding behind the figurative curtain.

## LISTENER PSYCHIC POWERS

Listeners are all Tier 2 creatures and innately possess a Psi of 2, as well as Psychometry 1, Psycholocation 3, and Psychocognition 2. More experienced Listeners who elect to focus on these abilities can attain higher degrees of mastery, increasing both Psi and Clairsentience modes up to 5, but this requires significant dedication and, in most cases, monastic training. Very few Listeners in the historical record have ever developed their abilities beyond this point, and they consider those few who have to be holy figures of manifest enlightenment, oft-observed through Psychometry by disciples hoping to emulate them.

Listeners believe that they have possessed Clairsentience for most of their recent evolutionary history, but as yet observations of the past have yet to conclusively demonstrate a definitive point at which point their ambush-predator ancestors developed it. All Listener scientists agree, however, that all anatomically modern Listeners possessed roughly the same abilities, albeit to a lower degree of refinement, that they do today.

## CONTACT

Listeners knew about humanity long before the Upeo arrived on Skete thanks to the powerful jump-shocks of the Leviathan jump ships, which the greatest of the Listener sages were able to detect not only from light-years away but also decades before they actually took place. The debate occupied the halls of the theocracy for much of that time, even filtering down into the general populace and becoming a subject of much debate and thought. Two prevailing camps emerged from this debate, one in favor of contact and one vehemently opposed.

Most members of the united Listener theocracy foresee great benefit in association with humanity, and has chosen to invest a tremendous amount of trust in them in no small part due to their enthusiastic use of Leviathans. After all, a species willing to shout its existence to one and all throughout the entire galaxy is taking a tremendous risk in order to learn about the universe, an impulse with which the Listeners culturally sympathize with, and what better way to announce that one's intentions are pure than to shed any hope of secrecy or stealth? To this camp, the most probable path to a good outcome was to relax their psionic shielding of Skete and allow a few outlying humans to "find" it, at which point constructive communication could take place — the first with another species, and an event of great moment and anticipation for a culture bent on total knowledge.

A significant minority of orders, mainly minor ones clustered around the larger and much more

### COVER YOUR EARS

What human visitors to Skete are not prepared for is the sheer volume of noise. Virtually every kind of animal-like creature makes some sort of sound, and most, like Listeners, are extremely loud. Choir barnacles build shells that whistle in the wind, stargrazers rumble infrasonic songs to one another as their titanic tentacles rip at kelp that whimpers out a harmonizing fear signal, and torpedofish stun their prey with rapid pulses of sound so powerful it can damage human hearing a mile away, nearly liquifying the internal organs of whatever was unfortunate enough to be closer. The humans fitted their embassy on Skete with high-grade soundproofing, and hearing protection of various kinds is freely available for personnel — the latter is *highly* recommended for any voyage away from the controlled and therefore relatively sedate shallows.

prestigious Sacred Trust of the Northward Sky-Reach (a loose translation of the native Listener appellation, as the direct translation of most Listener names and titles would require paragraphs of addenda and footnotes), opposed, and in fact still oppose human contact. According to their seers, humanity is due to enter a period of protracted danger, with multiple noetic wave fronts converging on it in eleven-dimensional spacetime. To them, associating with such a species, however well-intentioned they may be, is an extraordinarily reckless act. The majority weighed and ultimately rejected their concerns. These Listeners instead chose to follow a topological potentiality leading towards increased understanding of the universe while trusting in human ingenuity to overcome the dangers set against them. They understood that this would not be the first time that humanity had survived a brush with annihilation.

Now that humans have found Skete, of course, the question of contact is moot. The minority endlessly seeks potential avenues to terminate contact, but none are yet apparent that would do so in a time frame acceptable to them. Their one great success thus far has been an agreement hammered out with the majority — one that even the majority was largely in favor of — banning all Leviathan activity in the Skete system. Even those confident in humanity's future have no desire to call unwanted attention to themselves. Humans can only travel to or from Skete via a Upeo wa Macho teleporter, and then only into and out of the human embassy.

## RELATIONS WITH THE LISTENERS

The Upeo explorers who discovered the Listeners were not first contact specialists, and for that brief period when they were the face of humanity for Listeners, they viscerally felt the differences between them and their hosts. The Listeners were gracious, pleasant, and despite the communication barrier decidedly friendly — too friendly, in fact, as Listeners habitually touch virtually everything within reach, sentient or otherwise. The first three years of contact were almost entirely informal, with small teams of Upeo scientists visiting occasionally to study the biosphere and Listener culture. The only request the Listeners made was to not spread the word of their existence without need, out of a long-held and

insight-driven concern that it might put all of Skete into great peril. The Listeners also cautioned the Upeo, and urged them to spread the message to the rest of the human species, that they would do well to follow in the Listeners' footsteps. The universe, they insist, is a very dangerous place.

Following the return of the Upeo to Earth, they carefully presented news of the Listeners' existence to the United Nations and the Æon Trinity, who made provisions for a quiet contact process, which culminated in the establishment of a joint embassy on Skete. Formal contact only deepened the chasm of understanding between the two species, however, as the new specialists learned what the Upeo team had long since figured out — talking to Listeners can feel utterly futile at times. Listeners perceive causality as a topological medium, and while they accept the existence of a physical present as a physical necessity, their simultaneous perception of past and future combined with their distributed thought processes often results in, to human observers, conversation littered with non sequiturs that only make sense in hindsight — sometimes as long as hours or days afterward, particularly when speaking to monastic officials. A few Listeners, those who deal with humans often, have gotten better at presenting ideas in a human-friendly format, and human clairsentients often enjoy more success than their fellows at following Listener ideas. Most Listeners consider ISRA to be a human equivalent of their monastic orders, and the Listener government has been debating offering Otha Herzog a place among their number — his mastery of clairsentience makes him an exceedingly holy personage in their eyes.

Difficulties often arise between humans and Listeners when it comes to privacy. While Listeners understand the concept, they consider it a pretext for deception, and consequently often equate secrecy with potential violence. This is the same principle from which they derived the practice of hiding their society's effects upon the subquantum flux, with all major monastic orders hosting a staff permanently dedicated to "calming the waters." After all, if life seemed abundant but intelligent life was rare, to the Listeners it follows that the smart ones are staying hidden, either because they know they're in danger from other species, or are intent on harming other species. The less smart ones? Well, in such a model, intelligence is rare for a reason.

Similarly, one of the vilest things one can do in Listener culture is to knowingly lie. This, too, partially stems from the fear of private matters, but also stems from Listeners' gnostic faiths. To be in error is an opportunity to learn, but to knowingly lie is to stunt another's comprehension of the universe. Most Listeners are adept at talking around matters they don't wish to lie about, but when rhetorically cornered, virtually all will admit an unwillingness to discuss a given matter rather than make a false statement. Listener fiction, translations of which are often incomprehensibly esoteric, is composed entirely in a hypothetical mode of grammar, to make it clear that the subject matter makes no pretense of reality.

Despite the major physiological, cultural, and psychological differences between Listeners and humans, relations between the two have been stable ever since their establishment. The human embassy has grown from a small environmental shelter into a large offshore platform, similar to the oil rigs of the petroleum age, where a joint United Nations and Æon Trinity diplomatic team work together with scientists to better understand humanity's new neighbors, and to help them understand humanity in turn.

## THE HUMAN EMBASSY

Anchored off the coast of the primary continent, the embassy is a semi-submersible floating platform that extends above and below the surface, constructed in place by human engineers with advice and assistance from their Listener counterparts. Like virtually every surface on Skete, everything below the water and everything within splash distance above the water is now host to a profusion of life, from anemone-analogues to floral kelp. The access ports and landing pad remain clear, initially by nearly round-the-clock cleaning work, now using the same chemical markers that Listeners use to prevent life from intruding into sensitive machinery. Still very industrial-looking, the embassy struggles to fit the 2,500 diplomats, scientists, and workers who live here. Plans exist to develop the embassy further, with an atmospheric dome to filter out the excessive oxygen and provide a safe outdoor space, but for now filters and rebreathers are a necessity whenever leaving the compound, which contains airlocks to cycle the air and prevent oxygen-pockets from building up near doorways.

Safety personnel supply both visitors and individuals assigned to Skete with detailed instructions on survival procedures for high-oxygen worlds and how to recognize the signs of oxygen toxicity in others.

Given the high temperatures, rampant humidity, and thick atmosphere, most clothing worn out of doors is lightweight and breathable; Hawaiian shirts and other colorful clothes are popular, as they make it easy for the Listeners to distinguish individual humans by sight rather than by touch and taste, although this doesn't usually stop them from touching anyway. Small boats ferry humans to and from shore, and submersibles and diving apparatuses allow them to follow Listeners to the ocean floor.

The embassy staff centers on the diplomatic team and the scientists who report to them, but the population includes engineers, maintenance workers, support personnel, administration, and everything else necessary to operate a human settlement. The embassy is effectively a small town, just large enough that the on-site "bar," a lounge on the third floor above the surface, is virtually always busy — someone called it "Dry Land" early in the mission, and the name stuck.

Another group also lives in the human embassy, though they spend far more time out of doors and with the Listeners than the others: ISRA's own contact team, composed almost entirely of clairsentients and telepaths. While not secretive, the Listeners' habits have definitely started to rub off on them. They're often evasive or reticent even when they don't necessarily need to be, or pepper their conversations with references to difficult-to-translate Listener concepts and theories. As a result, they're often isolated by nothing more than self-selection, which in turn has made them paradoxically unpopular among the rest of the team despite how helpful they often are in bridging the gap of understanding between the others and the Listeners. Some vanish for days into Listener cities, ostensibly to hold lengthy and abstruse conversations with scholars and sages in the monastic orders. Sometimes, they participate in Listener vision-seeking rituals, where half a dozen or more Listeners will gather in a warm, shallow pool and entangle their arms, binding their power and insight together to seek truths too deep for a single mind alone.

## LISTENERS OFFWORLD

Contact with humanity has offered Listeners a chance to do something none have ever seriously considered — leave Skete. Instead of clairsentience-supported telepresence, they've now personally visited every other world in the Skete system, using human-designed biotech support sleeves to protect them from the vacuum. For them, it's rather like a human trying to perform a task requiring manual dexterity whilst wearing heavy mittens and blindfolded, but the opportunity to directly examine other worlds was too exciting to pass up.

Regrettably, those biotech sleeves aren't especially durable, and nor are they a necessity merely for vacuum work. Listeners require a partial pressure of oxygen in the atmosphere more than half-again what humans do at an absolute minimum, and would suffocate in human-safe atmospheres. Outside of specially-constructed environment habitats, the biotech sleeves and oxygen reservoirs are a necessity. Engineers are working to cultivate a better version of the sleeve, one that allows for greater manual dexterity and even a measure of taste and scent transmission, but it's still a work in progress. This, and Listeners' natural caution, has limited the spread of Listeners throughout human space, with only a few visiting other solar systems. A biodome is under construction in Cape Verde which will one day house a counterpart Listener embassy on Earth, assuming the United Nations and the Æon Trinity can convince them it's an acceptable risk.

## LOCAL LIFE

Skete teems with life, whether the domesticated ecosystem of the Listeners or the wilder depths of the ocean. From orbit, the planet looks green rather than blue, and it can be difficult to distinguish landmasses from the enormous sheets of kelp and algae that surround them.

### LISTENER DIPLOMAT

Seven-Times-Observed-in-Wisdom is the cutting-child of Foresight-Acknowledged-in-the-Fullness-of-Time, born from one of eir parent's tentacles and carefully cultivated for some years. After careful consideration, Seven-Times-Observed chose to follow Foresight-Acknowledged into the Order of the Unfurling Comprehension of the Sixth Charted Constellation, an ancient and well-regarded monastic order that was one of the first to champion the idea of contact with humanity. The Order has provided many of Skete's diplomats for the human contact mission, and Seven-Times-Observed is among their number. E is precocious, curious, but carries a measure of eir parent's reserve — an ideal Listener, in other words. E has spent many years observing humans, and a short few working hand-in-arm with them — e is one of the few Listeners to have set foot

on another world at all. E speaks fluent Spanish and Swahili, and can hold basic conversation in Mandarin and English. Seven-Times-Observed is very fond of humans and hopes to someday visit worlds beyond the Skete system, but has thus far declined all invitations to do so on orders from the Order of Unfurling Comprehension.

**Primary Pool:** 8 (diplomacy, curiosity)

**Secondary Pool:** 6 (athletics, human technology)

**Desperation Pool:** 4

**Edges:** Ambidextrous, Enhanced Attunement, Iron Will 2, Hardy 2

**Psi Trait:** 3

**Psi Modes:** Psychometry 2, Psycholocation 4, Psychocognition 3

**Defense:** 4

**Health:** 5

## TORPEDO FISH

Nearly half of these sleek, ten-meter predators consists of the organ they use both to echolocate and to hunt — a melon-analogue structure that produces tightly focused pulses of sound at such high amplitudes it stuns and even kills smaller prey outright. Usually, torpedo fish stay in the deep pelagic zone, but sometimes they stray closer to land.

**Primary Pool: 8** (sonic attacks, hunting, perception)

**Secondary Pool:** 6 (swimming, evasion)

**Desperation Pool:** 4

**Defense:** 4

**Health:** 5

**Edges:** Always Prepared, Hardy 3, Keen Sense (smell), Swift (swimming)

### SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Sonic Attack:** This attack has the following tags, Non-lethal, Quality 3, Ranged.

# YARRAN

This world is another that humanity will visit soon. ISRA planet hunters recently discovered a promising habitable world, and the Æon Trinity will soon send an expedition. Its land area consists of three small continents, two of which are slightly larger than Australia, and one of which is the size of South America. Yarran also contains a single vast supercontinent, approximately twice the size of Eurasia. The largest continent is almost entirely devoid of life. Most of the interior is an almost-lifeless region with only small amounts of moss and lichen. Life on the coast is far more abundant, but is still obviously in the process of reestablishing itself. The coasts have parse plants and soil, but only a few small animals, and appear to be gradually recovering from some event that stripped the entire continent of life. However, the rest of the world is teeming with life. Geological and xenobiological study will reveal that a cataclysmic event stripped the supercontinent of all life roughly 750 years ago, but before this point it possessed a thriving ecosystem.

This mystery is only one of three that this planet holds. The second is that a species with an exceedingly high-tech civilization once inhabited this continent. More than 700 years ago, they suddenly vanished, leaving their cities completely intact, but taking with them all living things on the continent, including their living technology. A few of their coastal cities seem to have suffered some form of bombardment, but exploration, modern sensors, and psychometry all reveal that these attacks all occurred more than a decade after the inhabitants abandoned these cities.

The planet's native inhabitants were multi-tentacled semi-sessile creatures that spent most of their time rooted in place, but could uproot and move to a new location, where they again rooted. Psychic investigation also easily reveals that these aliens were all exceptionally powerful psychics. Called Yarra by the Coalition phyle, they were approximately three meters tall and possessed eight large muscular tentacles, which each divided into three smaller, more dexterous tentacles near their tips. The Yarra had a simple root structure that they could retract into their bodies, and which they used to draw water and some nutrients from the soil. They were photosynthetic and except for laboratories for delicate experiments and other locations that were not practical

to leave open to the elements, almost none of their structures possessed roofs.

The third mystery is that the planet still has inhabitants — the descendants of the passengers of a crashed Coalition Ark. On the largest of the three smaller continents, there is the remains of a Coalition Ark very similar to the one heading for Earth. While clearly not designed to land, it somehow landed intact almost 800 years ago, but was unable to take off again. All of the occupants survived and still live on this world. Close examination of this Ark reveals that portions of its hull seems to have suffered extensive radiation damage slightly less than a decade before it landed.

The Coalition phyle still exist on Yarran, but unlike the Ark headed for Earth, there is no hint that they ever had any contact with Aberrants. In addition, there is evidence of at least one small civil war between different Coalition factions approximately 190 years after the Ark landed. Radiation readings in some locations that are now small glassy plains indicate that they fought some of this war using fusion bombs. In addition, the Ark was further damaged at this time, with sections of it showing evidence of centuries-old explosions. Today, the Coalition phyle use a few items of advanced technology that they have kept in working order, but their average level of technology is similar to Earth in the 1930s. They possess radios, vacuum tubes, and battery-powered vehicles, and generate electricity using wind and water power.

Additionally, the Coalition's hierarchy has fractured. Two of the continents are each ruled by a single small council of progenitors, while the continent where the Coalition Ark landed contains three nations, each ruled by a separate council of progenitors, both of which argue over access to and claim sole ownership of the remains of their Ark. Also, while most of the spinal warriors are as unthinkingly obedient as those found on the other Coalition Ark, a few of them, and a somewhat larger number of drones, envoys, and sasqs now seem slightly resistant to the progenitors' commands.

If human visitors reveal themselves, the progenitors whose nation they land in openly welcome them. These creatures are exceptionally eager to seize the explorers' technology and regain their place among the stars. Depending on the explorers' actions, the progenitors may decide to simply attempt to kill the explorers and steal their ship, or if the explorers appear to be at all helpful and sympathetic, the progenitors attempt to make an alliance with them, and gain technical assistance from Earth.

If asked why the largest continent is lifeless, the progenitors tell an elaborate story of how the previous inhabitants of this world used unknown technology to drag their Ark from the sky, and in retaliation, there was a vast war between the Coalition and the hostile aliens, until in desperation, the Coalition was forced to use a vast and terrible weapon to cleanse the alien's entire continent of life. Telepathy confirms that most members of the Coalition believe this story. However, many doubt it, but have no alternate theory to offer.

Regardless of what their attitude towards the progenitors appears to be, the characters are in danger when visiting this world. All five factions of progenitors are desperate to either regain their lost technology or to obtain access to the characters' technology, and each progenitor-ruled nation wishes to have sole access to the technology. If the characters appear willing to freely share their technology with one nation, they risk kidnapping and other threats by covert operatives working for other nations, and if they seem reluctant to share their technology with anyone, several nations may form a temporary secret alliance in order to capture some or all of the characters and attempt to force them to share their technology.

Also, if the characters openly demonstrate their psychic powers, the progenitors remain eager to steal their technology and continue to appear friendly, but plan to kill the characters as soon as they have acquired their technology. Probing the minds of the progenitors about their attitudes towards psychic powers swiftly reveals a deep-seated mixture of fear and loathing, but the characters can freely use any powers they can disguise as advanced technology. The phyle on this world have all lost enough knowledge of advanced science and technology that psions can fool them with moderately competent technobabble.

If the characters explore the planet, they eventually discover a few enclaves of between several dozen and several thousand drones, envoys, sasqs, and a smaller number of spinals who are living far from any of the major cities. These enclaves are typically located in isolated mountain valleys, in the midst of dense jungles, and similar remote environments. All of these enclaves consist of members of the servant phyle who are most resistant to progenitor control and who have fled from the progenitors. Also, as many as three percent of the population of these enclaves are Talents, who became Inspired due to the

## PLANETARY DATA: YARRAN

**Founded:** Involuntarily settled by Coalition phyle 780 years ago
**Discovery:** Undiscovered and unvisited by humans
**Distance from Earth:** 6,873 light years
**Star:** ST 7934 — G7
**Diameter:** 11,200 km
**Gravity:** 0.92 Earth
**Atmosphere:** Oxygen, nitrogen (breathable)
**Air Pressure:** 1.1 Earth
**Temperature:** –30° C to 40° C
**Percentage Ocean:** 71%
**Rotation Period:** 21 hours
**Native Life:** High diversity of animals, vegetables, microbes
**Coalition Population:** 100 million

residual subquantum energies on this world. The progenitors attempt to hunt down and exterminate all such enclaves, but the Talents who live in them have become exceedingly good at finding ways to hide their settlements, and their non-Inspired fellows eagerly assist in these efforts.

## NATIVE LIFE

Except for the barren supercontinent, Yarran is a temperate world with abundant native life. This life lacks any distinction between plants and animals. While some creatures are highly mobile, most have a sessile phase where they root in the ground, either when they are young and growing rapidly, or when they are adults who are breeding. Also, none of these creatures have internal skeletons and most have some form of tentacles, which in some species evolution modified into wings, gliding membranes, or fins for swimming. With relatively minimal preparation, both Coalition phyle and humans can eat most of this life. However, to remain healthy, Coalition phyle also eat an array of plants that they once grew in automated hydroponic tanks, and that they now farm.

## THE TRUTH ABOUT THE YARRA

The Coalition did not exterminate the Yarra, and the Yarra did not flee their world. Instead, they transcended, becoming beings of pure energy dwelling in remote and strange subquantum realities that even the most powerful psychics can barely sense or imagine. They were on the verge of this transcendence when the Coalition Ark visited their star system. When the Ark entered their star system, all the Yarra lived on the world's largest continent because their growing psionic powers caused them to wish to all be in relatively close proximity to one another.

This Coalition Ark was previously damaged when it passed too close to a star that went supernova, and badly needed a world it could mine for materials to make repairs. When the Coalition forces arrived, they discovered a thriving high-tech civilization that the progenitors hoped to conquer and incorporate into one of their phyle. Unfortunately for them, what the progenitors did not know was that the Yarra were not merely exceedingly powerful psychics, they were sufficiently mentally evolved that they were only a few decades away from transcending the physical universe. As soon as they read the Coalition's intentions, the Yarra mentally contacted them and ordered them to leave the star system.

Their desperation for repairs and their innate arrogance caused the to reject these demands. A few Yarra argued that they should use their powers to fix the Coalition Ark and let it go on its way, but most of the planet's inhabitants were horrified by the events they read from scanning the ship with their powers. As a result, before the Coalition could begin its attack, the Yarra briefly joined into a vast mass

## COALITION TALENTS ON YARRAN

While the characters are unlikely to be able to learn their exact number, or perhaps even of their existence, there are now almost 2,000 Talents on Yarran. All these Talents possess at least one dot of the Iron Will Edge, and are at least as resistant to the various Coalition pheromones as humanity, permitting them far more independence and free will than most of their kind.

Roughly 1,100 of these Talents live in the free enclaves of servant phyle. Almost 500 of the remainder live in the progenitor-controlled cities, working in secret to help free the other servant phyle — some smuggle individuals who are resistant to the progenitor's commands to one of the enclaves and work to protect the enclaves' secrecy, while others sow dissent with the hope that someday they can overthrow the progenitors' rule. However, more than 400 of these Talents remain loyal to the progenitors despite their resistance to control. Most Talents are drones, envoys, or sasqs, but a few are spinals. Talents who are working against the progenitors attempt to contact the characters, to both warn them about the progenitors and to seek their aid.

mind and pulled the vast Ark from orbit, causing it to roughly, but safely land on the largest of the three smaller continents that they had abandoned centuries before.

Because it was never designed to land, the Ark was far too badly damaged to ever take off again. In addition, the Coalition also discovered that all their smaller spacecraft were inexplicably broken, and they were unable to repair them. However, all residents of the Ark survived, and had to learn to live on a planet they were now unable to leave. After a few months, they built air vehicles to allow them to attempt to explore the world and attack the Yarra, but they found that they could venture no further than a few hundred kilometers away from supercontinent's shores, and so the Coalition struggled to maintain their technology and build a new starship. Slightly less than 40 years later, the Yarra ascended, taking all life on the largest continent with them. The barrier around the Coalition's continent fell, but it was now both deserted uninhabitable, since even the soil bacteria had vanished, leaving only almost indestructible ruins and a vast desert behind. However, the Coalition was now free to inhabit all three of the three smaller continents. In their anger, the Progenitors ordered pointless attacks on two of the Yarra's abandoned coastal cities.

A century and a half later, the Progenitors turned on one another in their efforts to horde their remaining advanced technology. Different groups of Progenitors formed separate nations and their wars that further damaged their grounded Ark and reduced the level of technology the phyle were able to sustain. Around this same time, stories grew up among the servant phyle and the younger Progenitors that the oldest surviving Progenitors, who had been born in space, had exterminated the Yarra and blasted their continent as punishment for grounding the Ark. After a few more centuries, the lack of advanced medicine meant that even the impressively long-lived Progenitors began dying of old age, and so no one remembered the truth.

Today, a growing number of the servant phyle are becoming slightly resistant to Progenitor commands because the carefully controlled breeding and genetic surgery that the Progenitors used to prevent any deviation from their desired genotypes is no longer possible. Instead, the Progenitors kill any member of the servant phyle that is too openly disobedient, but lack the technology for ubiquitous surveillance, and are only partially aware of the fact that almost a quarter of the drones, envoys, and sasqs, and nearly a tenth of the spinals are at least somewhat resistant to the Progenitor's command pheromones.

### LEARNING THE TRUTH

Since none of the Coalition phyle fully understand what happened to the Yarra or the details of their arrival, there are only a few ways for characters visiting Yarran to learn what happened. Explorers can find some of the answers by visiting the Yarra's cities. Except for the two coastal cities that the Coalition bombed out of spite and anger more than a decade after the Yarra departed, the Yarra's cities are not only perfectly intact, they also appear like the inhabitants departed in a calm, orderly, and carefully planned fashion. The inhabitants carefully put away every mundane object and left their cities spotless, because

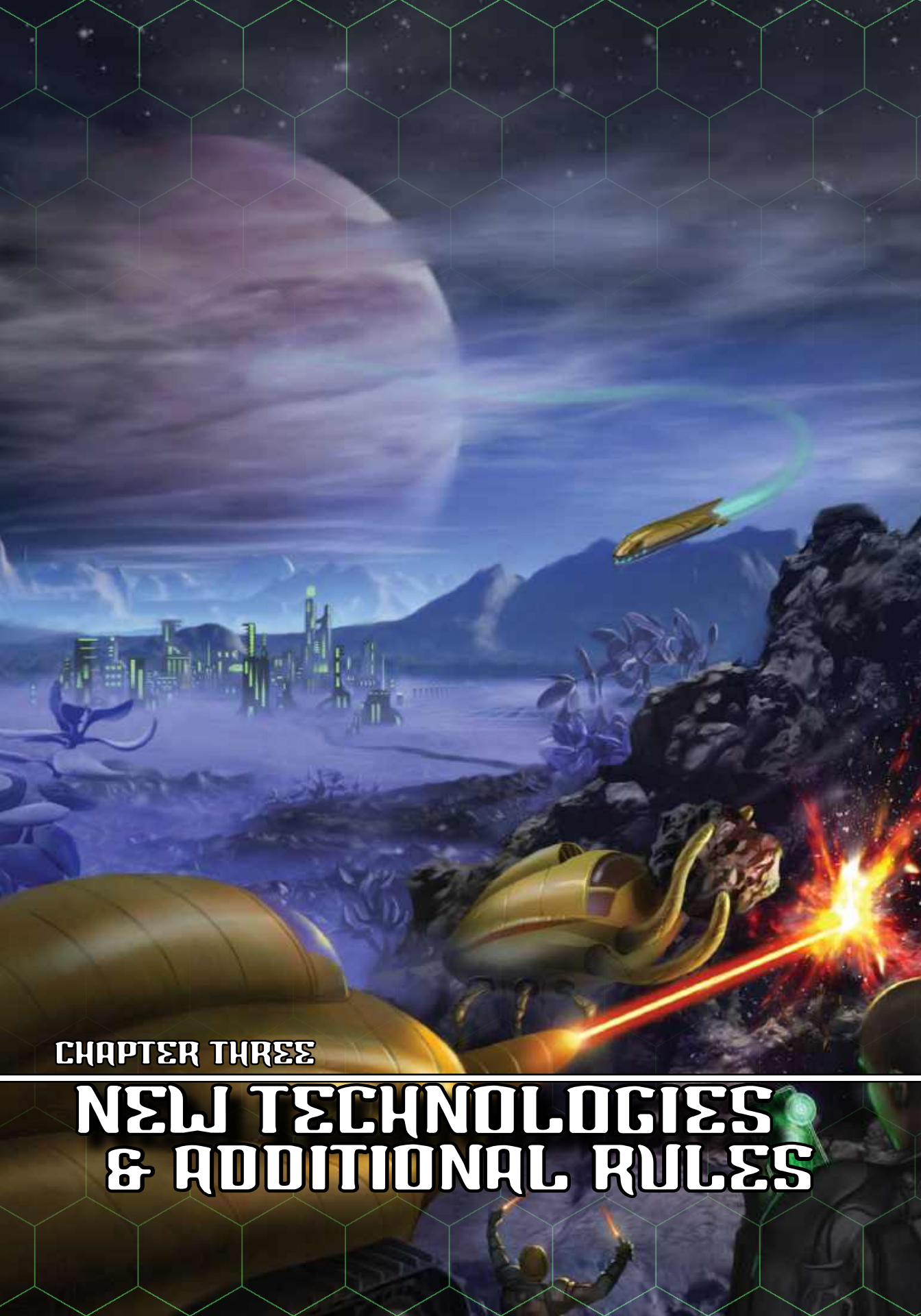
they knew they would never return, but they valued the place they were leaving behind. Psychometry provides more information, but is also quite difficult, since the vast psychic signature of the Yarra's transcendence will overwhelm most clairsentients. Unless the clear can buy off a level 4 Complication, all they sense is a vast and sudden outpouring of psychic power that is both more powerful than anything they have ever sensed and also simultaneously excited, peaceful, and filled with profound joy. Any clear who overcomes this Complication can also learn about life in the city before the Yarra transcended, and gain visions of Yarra daily life and their planning for transcendence. However, all such information is fragmentary and difficult to understand, because the Yarra's minds and powers are tens of thousands of years more advanced than humanity's. The only way to learn more about the Yarra is by visiting one of their psychic plazas (p. XX).

The best way to learn the truth about the Coalition phyle living on this world is to examine the Coalition Ark. This is far more difficult than visiting the Yarra's cities, since the three Progenitor-ruled nations on that continent all guard it protectively and fear humans would attempt to steal some of their secrets. However, offering any useful technology or even promising to do so will allow visitors to explore the Ark accompanied by a single young Progenitor and several spinals. Alternately, the characters can use advanced technology and their psionic powers to sneak in, since all entrances to the Ark are well guarded, but often there is no one inside.

Regardless of how they gain access to the Ark, Psychometry reveals much information. The information is again fragmentary, but clearly shows that some unknown (to the Coalition) power dragged the Ark from space, and also that images of the time the Ark was ground are less clear because of the overwhelming psychic signature that the Yarra's combined power created. Clears can also learn that a powerful wave of radiation from a supernova struck the Ark more than a decade before it entered the Yarran system, and that it was already damaged and desperately needed repairs.

There is also another way to gain even more information. The ship's computers lack power, but some of them are at least partially intact. Providing power to them and attempting to coax their remaining data out via normal means would be almost impossible for anyone who was not also fluent in the Coalition's language and at least somewhat familiar with Coalition computers. However, a skilled Technokinetic can simply use their powers to examine the data directly.

Also, psychics who have visited the Coalition Ark headed towards the solar system who succeed at a Difficulty 4 roll learn that this Ark met up with the Ark headed towards the solar system almost 4,000 years ago, and that the Progenitors on these two Arks exchanged servant phyle, which explains why the servant phyle on these two Arks are so similar.



CHAPTER THREE

# NEW TECHNOLOGIES & ADDITIONAL RULES

Man is an artifact designed for space travel. He is not designed to remain in his present biologic state any more than a tadpole is designed to remain a tadpole.
— William S. Burroughs

# HUMAN SPACE-RELATED TECHNOLOGIES

The following devices are specifically related to space and space travel.

## WEAPONS

Engineers specifically designed the following weapons for the challenges of interstellar exploration or colonization, or reverse-engineered them from alien designs.

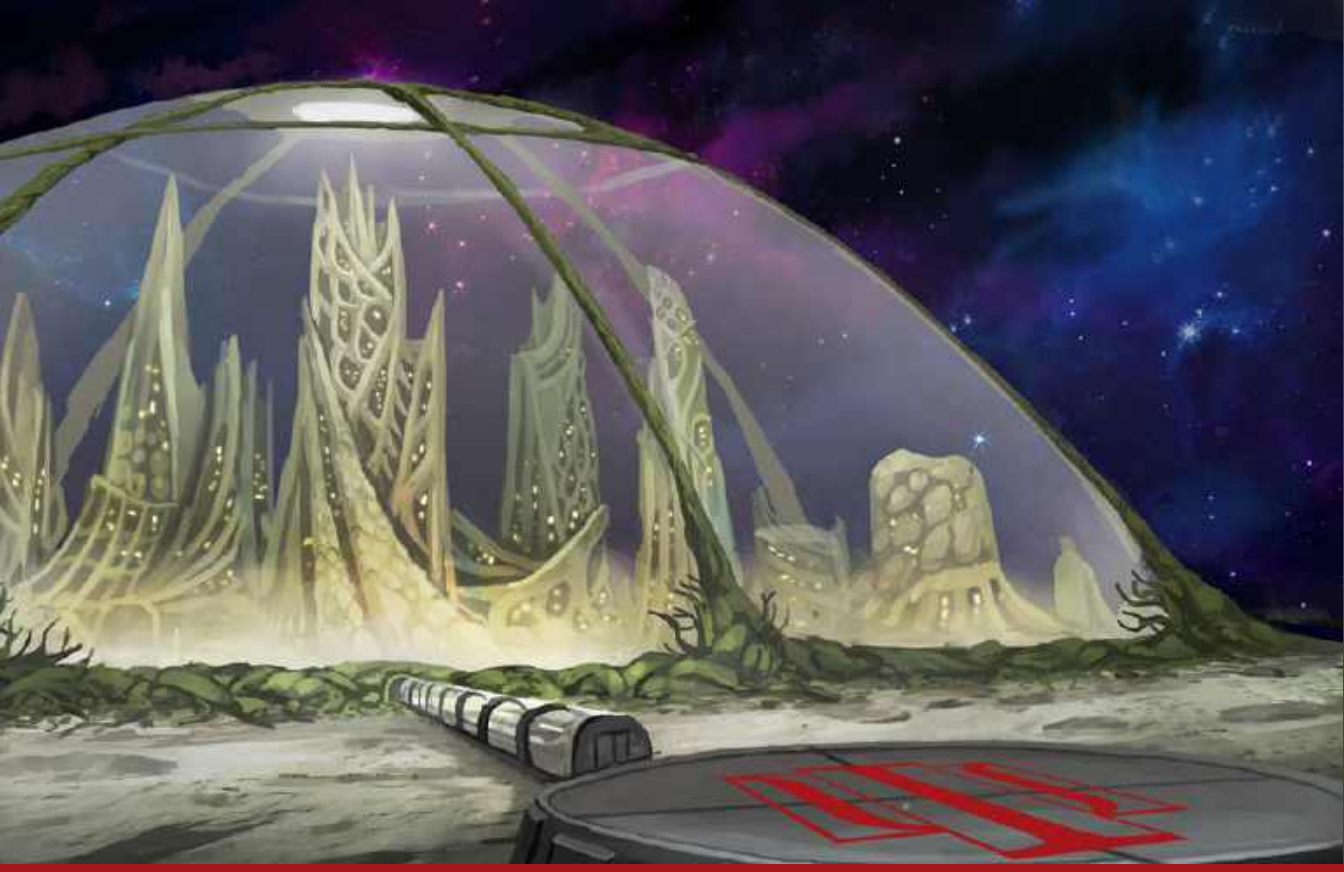
**Survival Carbine:** A distressing number of exoplanets harbor large, dangerous fauna with well-protected vital organs. Stopping an attack before an explorer winds up in a hand-to-appendage fight requires a weapon that delivers massive penetrating trauma, yet isn't so heavy and awkward that it gets left behind all the time. A survival carbine uses the same principles as coilgun heavy weapons, but fires heavier projectiles in semi-automatic mode. Keeping it charged and fed requires only a power source and a machine shop, which makes it preferable to a slugthrower on extrasolar colony worlds. Because they're designed for swift defensive use against a charge or ambush, survival carbines are light and short at the expense of a longer rifle's range. This makes them rare in military use outside the occasional unit that expects to face Aberrants or VARGs in tight terrain. **Examples:** Ceska Zbrojovka Model 954, Forsythe Arms MDGR, L-K Goalkeeper

**Rail Rifle ("dinosaur gun"):** This electromagnetic weapon is a survival carbine upsized and outfitted with the best optics available. The added bulk and mass negate any hope of quick handling, making it good only for carefully prepared shots. Its target audience is less the exoplanet explorer than the big game hunter for whom terrestrial bloodsport has proven insufficient. Most dinosaur guns are built to order, melding traditional gunsmiths' craftsmanship with the latest in applied physics. A few unadorned models have entered limited production as anti-materiel rifles for military applications. **Examples:** L-K Striker, Reeves & Sons Series D, Weatherby Mk. LII

**Balefire Launcher:** The most surprising thing about a gun firing slugs of incendiary, toxic, radioactive metal is that humanity didn't think of it first. The balefire launcher, which has only recently crept out from the lab to limited production, is a direct adaptation of the weapon first encountered on Ivdel in the arsenal of the Mantes (p. XX). Like the alien original, its ammunition is a pyrophoric plutonium alloy encapsulated in a polymer sheath,

### NEW WEAPONS TABLE

| WEAPON TYPE | EN | RANGE | DMG TYPE | TAGS | TECH | SIZE | FT | COST |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Survival Carbine | 4 | Short | Ballistic | Piercing, Quality 3, Ranged, Two-Handed | Hard | Medium | - | • • |
| Rail Rifle | 5 | Short | Ballistic | Brutal, Destructive, Heavy Weapon, Ranged, Tactical Sight, Two-Handed | Hard | Large | - | • • • |
| Balefire Launcher | 5 | Short | Incendiary | Aggravated, Deadly, Heavy Weapon, Incendiary, Non-Penetrating, Ranged, Restricted, Spread | Hard | Large | - | • • • • |



but the human version uses chemical propellant for increased range and velocity. A balefire round shatters on impact, spraying its burning payload across the target and the immediate area; contamination inflicts indirect damage with rating 2 and the Aggravated, Continuous (hour), and Deadly tags. There is debate as to whether this heavy weapon has any legitimate use that isn't at least technically a war crime. **Examples:** Brandewie Group Basilisk, Klimovsk P43

## EXPLORATION TECHNOLOGIES

The following technologies are designed for use by extrasolar explorers and colonists.

### ATMOSPHERE BALLS (A-BALLS)

The advent of the survival blanket (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 284) spawned several derivatives in biotech life support. Among these were atmosphere balls, a resurrection of a concept from spaceflight's early days. The family of A-ball designs includes several distinct types, each a variation on the basic function of keeping a single subject alive in a hostile environment for an extended period.

An A-ball stores itself as a malleable basketball-sized package. When a user yanks its deployment tab, it unfurls into a four-meter sphere with a one-meter hatch. The user crawls inside the A-ball and seals the hatch, whereupon the bioapp's life support functions become active. The A-ball provides breathable atmosphere, survivable temperature and humidity, and nutrition, hydration, and waste disposal for 10 days or until someone breaches the seal. Its high-visibility exterior is radar-reflective and mounts a small radio locator beacon and a set of visual and infrared strobes with 30-day batteries. Two small viewports allow the occupant to observe her surroundings or the occupant can polarize them for privacy.

An A-ball can place its occupant into hibernation, as per a survival blanket. If formatted, the user can activate an A-ball via mental command. It will then englobe its owner and seal around her without further intervention.

**Escape ball (E-ball):** UN regulations require every spacecraft to carry sufficient escape systems for every passenger and crewmember, and E-balls are rapidly replacing emergency vacuum suits as the last-ditch egress option for unskilled spacefarers.

An E-ball's skin contains several layers of radiation shielding and mounts an up-rated beacon and strobes to increase detection ranges. **Tech:** @, **Armor Tags:** Environmental 2 (radiation), **Tolerance:** •, **Size:** Medium, **Cost:** •

**Incarceration ball (I-ball):** An I-ball is designed to ensure the safety of prisoners in a catastrophic incident. It operates as a standard E-ball or S-ball but can be sealed and opened only from the outside. Most I-balls display their owners' logos and conspicuous warnings about their likely occupants. I-balls can't be formatted, but they contain built-in sensors to display information about their occupant. These are common on military and law enforcement vessels for prisoner safety. They've also begun to appear on civilian vessels as an occasional and temporary alternative to installing a permanent brig. **Tech:** @, **Armor Tags:** Environmental 1, **Size:** Medium, **Cost:** ••

**Quarantine ball (Q-ball):** A portable isolation ward, the Q-ball is a partial solution for situations in which an explorer encounters a potential biohazard. Its interior is nonreactive with most known microorganisms, preventing further infestation of the bioapp systems, and its life support package includes immune boosters that provide 2 Enhancement to resist diseases and toxins. Its exterior, marked with prominent biohazard symbols, is flame-retardant and acid-resistant to facilitate decontamination. It also has a one-way port for supplemental nutrient injections to keep its life support functions active indefinitely. Deluxe models include remote sensors that aid in diagnosing the occupant, negative pressure systems to prevent outside contamination in a small puncture, and enlarged one-way ports or even glove sleeves to allow treatment while remaining safely outside. **Tech:** @, **Armor Tags:** Environmental 2 (acid, fire), **Tolerance:** ••, **Size:** Medium, **Cost**: ••

**Survival ball (S-ball):** Intended for use on a planetary surface, engineers manufacture every S-ball for a specific world's atmosphere and biosphere. Its coloration contrasts vividly with that planet's vegetation. The user can unseal and re-seal an S-ball without compromising its life support functions, which last up to 30 days if it's deployed on the intended world. S-balls developed for worlds with large lakes or oceans include flotation capability and their nutrient bioapps can distill drinkable water from local sea water. **Tech:** @, **Armor Tags:** Environmental 1, **Tolerance:** •, **Size:** Medium, **Cost:** ••

**Biofilter:** Similar to a gillbreather, this device is a mask that fits over one's nose and mouth and is usually connected to a small processing pack worn on the back. It filters out particulates, and removes gases that would be harmful to the wearer, including excessive amounts of both carbon dioxide and oxygen. If not formatted, the biofilter can perform this task for up to eight hours before it requires rest and nutrient injections; if formatted, it bonds to the user and may be used indefinitely. Hardtech versions of the biofilter use replaceable filter cartridges, which the user must replace after six hours, but do not have the attached processing system and thus are much more portable; most models are foldable so users can fit them into a pocket. However, their filters only protect against a single set of potentially harmful gases. Wearers must install different filters if they move from one dangerous atmosphere to another. Most humans visiting Skete use the bioapp. **Tech:** @ or Hard, **Size:** Medium (biotech), Small (hardtech), **Tolerance:** • or n/a, **Cost:** •

**Breacher Bar:** The meter-long apotheosis of the venerable firefighter's "halligan" is a powered semi-smart tool for breaking things. Its uses range from exploration to rescue to burglary. One end is a smart polymer tip with a variety of programmed shapes ranging from a razor-thin wedge to a robust gooseneck hook to an axe head to a variable-geometry socket wrench. The other end is an adjustable electric arc plasma cutter with a maximum penetration depth of 15 cm. The breacher bar's shaft can extend up to 2.5 meters for additional leverage. A breacher bar provides 2 Enhancement to forcible entry attempts. As an improvised weapon, it functions as the user's choice of axe or staff (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 282). Engaging the plasma cutter adds the Destructive and Incendiary tags to the staff attack, but a botch is messy. **Tech:** Hard, **Size:** Large, **Cost:** ••

**Infinite Canteen:** This one-liter cylinder is deceptive, holding only a half-liter of liquid. A mechanism that constantly draws air through vents around its circumference and distills purified water out of even the faintest amount of atmospheric vapor makes up its remaining volume. Its production rate depends on ambient humidity, with a jungle yielding a refill in a few hours while a desert might only provide one refill a day. It also can heat or chill

its contents from 10° C to 90° C for comfort or meal preparation. **Tech:** Hard. **Size:** Medium, **Cost:** •

**Mapper Aviary:** This system, transported in three backpack-sized cases, is designed for wide-area survey. The first case contains a dedicated mini-comp and storage unit for its copious data-gathering capabilities. When activated, it launches a tethered aerostat with a powerful communication array. The other two cases then deploy eight variable-geometry aerial drones with full electromagnetic spectrum (full-spectrum, gamma ray to extremely low frequency radio), magnetic, and thermal imaging capabilities. The drones execute a coordinated survey pattern which generates a holographic map and imagery set (down to 1 cm resolution) of one square kilometer in 10 minutes in open terrain. The drones often require as long as 30 minutes to map dense vegetation areas. Users can also utilize this system to perform real-time surveillance, and the aerostat functions as an OpNet node and can transmit to low orbit. The drones aren't particularly stealthy but possess phenomenal endurance. **Tech:** Hard, **Size:** Size 0 (total), **Cost:** •••

**Mapper Hive:** This medium-sized case is the mapper aviary's smaller, more detail-oriented cousin. It's equally popular with xenoarchaeologists and forensic investigators. When activated, it deploys a dozen mouse-sized drones resembling mechanical spiders with multi-lensed sensor turrets for heads. The drones image their assigned area down to one-micron resolution at a rate of one minute per cubic meter (again, slower for cluttered areas). Faster recording is possible at the expense of resolution: dropping to human visual acuity (about 0.1 mm) yields recording speeds of 20 cubic meters per minute. In either mode, the resulting record is usable for anything from 3D printing templates to ultra-realistic holographic reconstructions. **Tech:** Hard, **Size:** Medium, **Cost:** •••

**Orgotek Noetic Link:** Derived from the recently released noetic bugs (***Æon Æxpansion***, p. 30), this device is designed as a biocomp accessory. The latest Orgotek biocomps all possess attachment points to accommodate this device, but this device works with any biocomp. Because OpNet radio transmissions cannot penetrate strong radio interference or thick walls without the use of repeaters that may not be available in remote regions or on previously unvisited worlds, noetic links allow users to connect their biocomps to one another, and to the main biocomp on board any biotech spacecraft, including a Leviathan jump ship.

This connection is semi-telepathic and permits the biocomp to send and receive data from any other biocomp connected to a noetic link that is within range. All noetic links have a range equal to Extreme (100 km) or, if formatted by a psion, the psion's Attunement range, whichever is longer. They also automatically network together, allowing units in contact with one another to use the maximum range of any unit in the network.

Noetic links permit the same speed of transmission of data, video, or voice that the OpNet does and work anywhere within range, including deep underground or underwater. Any psion with one or more dots in Fundamentals, Mindshare, or Technokinesis can use these Modes to detect a noetic link while it is broadcasting. Deciphering this communication requires either Technokinesis or reading the user's mind. Conventional devices designed to detect radio signals cannot detect transmissions via noetic link. This device only functions when formatted. **Tech:** @, **Size:** Tiny, **Tolerance:** •, **Cost:** •

**Reentry Pack:** This backpack-sized device allows users to safely descend from orbit to the surface of a planet with nothing more than it and a working space suit. When activated, biotech foam in the pack expands into a personal heat shield that is a concave disk 2.5 meters in diameter with straps for the user to attach herself to. If the user is injured, the device reshapes itself to aid in this process. Once attached, the unit's navigational SI automatically directs it to land on the nearest potentially habitable planet or moon. If no such planet is nearby, the SI suggests landing on any nearby world that is no more dangerous than remaining in orbit, but requires the wearer's consent to proceed. The device contains a powerful single-use piece of psychokinetic biotech that uses telekinetic propulsion to begin reentry and augments its heat shield with a perikinetic bubble around the wearer and the heat shield. Once the device has completed reentry, it automatically deploys a conventional parachute. Users do not need to format this device, but can only use it once. **Tech:** @, **Size:** Size 0, **Cost:** ••

**Shipsuit:** Originally a Ministry design for the Chinese fleet, the shipsuit now sees use across human space. This bioapp resembles a tailored flight suit with detachable boots and gloves and a bulky collar that contains a roll-out hood. A touchpad on the underside of the wrist controls a layer of

engineered chromatophores that can change the suit's color and pattern. However, fashion is secondary to the shipsuit's primary role in reducing resource use and improving hygiene within the closed environment of a spaceship or habitat. Its inner lining scavenges sweat, dead cells, and other waste, condenses the matter it can't use for nourishment, and excretes inert, sterile pellets into a collection pocket. Combined with its self-repair capabilities, this makes a shipsuit capable of theoretically indefinite wear. Additionally, in a hull compromise, the hood can extrude a single-use sealed visor and provide a 30-minute emergency air supply. A shipsuit is compact enough for use under most conventional armor, a fact that hasn't escaped the Seventh Legion and other space marine forces. It's not a full-up BES (**Trinity Continuum: *Æon***, p. 270) but it's also much more affordable than one. **Base:** Slash Resistant, **Tags:** Concealable, Environmental 1, **Size:** Medium, **Tech:** @, Cost**:** •

**Taming Collar:** This device is the result of a recent collaboration between vitakinetic researchers working for the *Æon* Trinity and psi order Norça. It is an adjustable collar covered in brightly colored insect chitin. Any animal the user places it on becomes calm, obedient, and able to understand basic commands like "come here," "stop," or "follow me." It is specifically designed to work on alien animals, but using it requires a technician obtain biological samples from the type of animal it is to be used on so the device can be adapted for use on that animal. Modifying a taming collar to work with a particular species requires several hours for animals not in the device's database. Once completed, adapting other taming collars to that species takes only a few minutes. After the user places the collar on an animal, the animal ceases being frightened or aggressive in the presence of humans and obeys exceedingly simple commands like those mentioned above. The animal can also learn more complex commands, and learns them as well as a particularly smart and obedient animal, like an intelligent breed of dog.

Psions can format taming collars, allowing them to sense the animal's emotions and give it more precise commands that it automatically understands and will follow. Users can also make use of the animal's senses for one scene by spending 1 Psi point and succeeding at a Psi + Cunning roll. All these abilities function as long as the animal is within Long range of the user. This device only works on animals less intelligent than higher primates like gorillas and chimpanzees. Taming collars automatically fail when used on sentient or near-sentient creatures. **Tech:** @, **Size:** Small, **Tolerance:** ••, **Cost:** ••

# ADDITIONAL VEHICLES

The following vehicles are all in regular use outside the solar system.

## NEW VEHICLE TAG

The following new vehicle tag exists.

**Burrowing (2):** This vehicle can bore through both packed earth, clay, and solid rock and the operator can use it to construct tunnels. The largest possible vehicles with this tag have a Size of 3, and most are Size 2.

## COLONIZATION AND EXPLORATIONS VEHICLES

Engineers specifically created the following vehicles for use by interstellar colonists and explorers.

**Constructor:** This durable biotech vehicle is invaluable when establishing a colony and building basic infrastructure, but is also functions as a general purpose transport. It's a 10-limbed walking biotech vehicle with six legs and four arms that can reshape themselves to a limited degree. It can operate as anything from a snowplow, bulldozer, or a crane. It can also be used as a cargo or passenger vehicle. Its one limitation is that without formatting operating its many limbs requires specialized training.

**General Purpose Explorer:** This inexpensive biotech landing craft is widely used on colony worlds as both a vehicle to carry passengers and cargo to or from orbiting spacecraft, as well as a transport capable of swiftly traveling to orbit any portion of the planet. Its biotech interior can reshape itself into a cargo hold, up to 20 passenger seats, or four small cabins, which if necessary, can house up to eight explorers in cramped conditions.

**Tunnel Borer:** This hardtech vehicle uses an advanced plasma drill that allows it to move through solid rock as easily as through packed clay. Unless it is moving through loose soil, the plasma drill creates a smooth glass-like tunnel that is relatively sturdy even without additional support. When tunneling through loose earth or other potentially unstable materials, it sprays a hardening bioplastic to reinforce the tunnel. This vehicle can tunnel through 10 feet of earth or stone per hour. It is also possesses retractable scoops and shovels that it can use to

## COLONIZATION AND EXPLORATIONS VEHICLES TABLE

| TYPE | SIZE | HANDLING | SPEED | TAGS | WEAPONS | TECH | FT | COST |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constructor | 2 | +0 | 4 | Armor 1, All-Terrain 1, Cargo 1, Complex 0, Computer 0, Fast 2, Psi −1, Tools 1 | - | @ | • • | • • • • |
| General Purpose Explorer | 2 | +1+ | 6/[3] | Armor 1, Cargo 1, Computer 0, Hybrid 2, Maneuverable 1, Psi −1, Repair Bots 1 | - | @ | • • | • • • • |
| Tunnel Borer | 2 | −1 | 2 | Armor 2, All-Terrain 1, Burrowing 2, Complex 0, Computer 0, Sluggish −1, Tools 1 | - | Hard | - | • • • • |

## ASTEROID MINING VEHICLES TABLE

| TYPE | SIZE | HANDLING | SPEED | TAGS | WEAPONS | TECH | FT | COST |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Breaker | 2 | +0 | [2] | Armor 1, Cargo 1, Computer, Limited Astrogation Systems, Tools 1, Weaponry 2 | Laser Carbine, Missile Launcher | Hard | - | • • • • |
| Harvester | 3 | +0 | [4] | Armor 1, Astrogation Systems, Cargo 2, Complex, Computer, Crew −1, Tools 1, Thrusters 1, Weaponry 1 | Laser Carbine, Web Emitter | Hard | - | • • • • • |
| Trawler | 3 | +0 | [4] | Armor 1, Astrogation Systems, Cargo 2, Complex, Computer, Crew −1, Thrusters 1, Tools 1 | - | Hard | - | • • • • |
| Hauler | 5 | −2 | [3] | Astrogation Systems, Armor 1, Cargo 4, Computer, Crew −1, Massive 3, Sluggish −2 | - | Hard | - | • • • • • |

excavate and shape larger underground chambers, which is then finishes with its plasma drill.

## ASTEROID MINING VEHICLES

Both Karroo station and various bases in the solar system's asteroid belt are centers for asteroid mining, and as humanity settles in more star systems, asteroid mining will take place there too. The following are some of the most common asteroid mining craft.

**Breaker:** These are small, short-range craft equipped with missiles that can fragment smaller asteroids and lasers that can cut off ore-bearing rocks for transport to the base or hauler that has deployed the breaker.

**Harvester:** Harvesters are swift, long-range prospecting vessels that locate promising asteroids,

mine valuable deposits, and then return to base carrying the cargo. Harvesters are most often used to locate and collect high-quality finds, leaving bulk ore collection to breakers and haulers.

**Trawler:** These ships are most common in Karroo Mining Station, where asteroid miners use them to collect ionized gases. They can deploy large magnetic "nets" several hundred meters in diameter to collect oxygen, nitrogen, and a variety of other useful gases. In other star systems, trawlers can also collect gases from the upper atmospheres of large frozen moons like Titan or jets of water or gas spewed out by smaller moons like Enceladus or Io.

**Hauler:** This large asteroid mining vessel is designed to carry massive quantities of mined materials back to its base of operations. Haulers typically carry four breakers out to likely asteroids to process them.

## NEW UPEO WA MACHO SPACECRAFT

Upeo wa Macho recently contracted for three new types of spacecraft designed for interstellar exploration. In addition, the Æon Trinity purchased several *Karwe*-class jump ships for its own exploratory efforts.

***Chui*-class Escort Frigate:** The Upeo naval architecture program extends beyond jump ships, though some projects remain covert for now. Recognizing the need for smaller vessels that can fight but unwilling to trust Orgotek's *Scarab*-class frigates, the teleporters are using the *Bundi* development program to hide the creation of their own warships. The 65-meter *Chui* (Swahili for "leopard") class will be capable of limited independent operations, but it's intended to serve mainly as a scout and protector for *Bundi* missions. Its normal crew complement is 11 but accommodations for an additional 14 passengers allow extended operations, albeit in cramped quarters. A full space-to-surface flight envelope enables it to carry those same passengers planetside if teleportation isn't an option. The *Chui*, first of its class, will launch late in 2123, with another four ships projected to enter service in 2124.

Psions must separately format a *Chui*'s piloting and gunnery systems separately: formatting piloting offers 1 Enhancement and formatting gunnery offers 1 Enhancement to related actions. In either case, if the psion is a teleporter, this becomes 2 Enhancement thanks to next-generation bioapps that capitalize on a teleporter's intuitive understanding of spatial relationships.

***Bundi*-class Jump Ship:** The first-generation jump ships of the Leviathan class descended from bioapps the Upeo abandoned in 2115. The need for a teleportation-capable sentience to control interstellar jumps yielded the Tessers, the intelligent biocomputers that form the Leviathans' cores. Learning of this development sparked a fierce debate within the Upeo over the ethics of creating an intelligent species for the purpose of servitude. The *Bundi* and her sister ships are a partial answer to this dilemma. Unlike the Leviathans and the *Nyangumi* and *Karwe* classes, the *Bundi* class uses a teleportational helm (**Trinity Continuum: Aeon**, p. 291) rather than a Tesser.

Jumping requires a teleporter formatted to the starship, but Upeo shipwrights specifically designed *Bundis* exclusively for this psi order's own use. A *Bundi* is relatively smaller and more agile than a Leviathan and capable of multi-year deployments. It can't survive atmospheric entry or flight, but it is structurally capable of withstanding planetary landings if teleported to the surface. Its designed complement is 60 crew and 120 passengers, though its life support systems can handle up to 600 personnel under short-term emergency conditions. It's capable of externally docking two biotech frigates and two hybrid transports.

### WINDHOVER EXPLORATION BIOVARG

Æon Trinity engineers created this civilian bioVARG to operate in difficult and dangerous environments and optimized it for exploration.

**Subtype: Scout**

**Size:** 1

**Tech:** Biotech

**Tolerance:** • • •

**Life Support Days:** Unlimited

**Armor:** Hard 3, Soft 3

**Base Speed:** 3 on land

**Description:** This small humanoid bioVARG functions as a large and exceedingly durable advanced hostile environment suit that allows the user to safely explore almost any world.

**Weapons:** None

| TYPE | SIZE | HANDLING | SPEED | TAGS | WEAPONS | TECH | FT | COST |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Chui*-class Escort Frigate | 4 | +1 * | 6/[5] | Armor 2, Cargo 2, Computer 0, Crew −3, Hybrid 2, Maneuverable 1, Massive 2, Military 1, Psi −1, Thrusters 2 | Laser Carbine, Missile Launcher | @ | • • • | L |
| *Bundi*-class Jump Ship | 5 | +0* | [5] | Armor 1, Astrogation Systems, Cargo 3, Complex 0, Computer 0, Crew −3, Massive 3, Psi −1, Repair Bots 1, Thrusters 2, Weaponry 1 | Laser Carbine | @ | • • • | L |

* Reduce handling by 1 if not formatted.

**Tags:** Additional Armor, Augmented Run, Enhanced Environmental 2 (temperature extremes), Jump Jets, Super Science 1

**Unique Ability:** To assist with extrasolar exploration, the Windhover bioVARG provides its pilot with an Enhanced Sensory Suite.

*Enhanced Sensory Suite:* This ability functions for both neutrals and psions, providing them both with the Photokinetic ability EM Sight (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 228). Unlike conventional sensors, this ability provides full 360 degree vision in a way that is easily comprehensible to all formatted users.

**Cost:** • • • • •

## SPECIALIZED PEREZISTA TECHNOLOGY

Known primarily for their utopian ideals and disdain of hardtech, many think of the Perezistas as a charming and unusual throwback to a nontechnological paradigm, something akin to a modern-day version of the 20th-century hippies. The truth is anything but — Perezistas are as skilled at science as they are faithful, and are pushing the boundaries of biotech. Though they may be small in number and lack the funding of biotech giants like Orgotek, they do have one key advantage: they are entirely willing to experiment on themselves.

**Kreusa-class Bio-shuttle:** As the Perezistas consider all hardtech to be toxic (a stance that, admittedly, is not often wrong when it comes to rocket fuel), they have become particularly enthused with creating new biotech apps and devices to fill needs that would otherwise go unfulfilled. Space travel was the one big stumbling block — even biotech ships have hardtech components like hyperfusion engines. The Perezistas on Far Nyumba overcame that stumbling block.

The Perezistas created the Kreusa-class shuttle from an oceanic filter-feeder native to Far Nyumba, as well as two dozen other genetic donors. This organism electrolyzes water, separating out hydrogen and storing it in enormous cavities within its body, which bloats to carry its primary reaction mass payload. Enormous, paper-thin fins serve as radiators to keep this hydrogen at cryogenic temperatures. This vehicle uses a biological version of a nuclear thermal rocket, heating the hydrogen with a natural fission reactor organ. The Kreusa supplies this reactor by filtering trace radioactive ions from seawater as it fuels itself, or biotechnicians can surgically implant a critical mass of fissile materials directly.

As it nears launch readiness, its center of gravity shifts rearward, lifting its bow out of the water. Its sensitive surfaces retract for launch, and the shuttle roars into orbit on a column of fire and vapor. In vacuum, the Kreusa respires its own oxygen at need, and photosynthesizes by deploying additional dorsal and ventral fins.

Despite its mammoth size when carrying a launch-ready fuel payload, the actual interior space and dry mass of the Kreusa is quite small. Four small encysted chambers within serve as habitats, with one for the pilot's cabin. Engineering spaces, which is to say the Kreusa's internal organs, are accessible only through narrow ducts. The airlocks,

| TYPE | SIZE | HANDLING | SPEED | TAGS | WEAPONS | TECH | FT | COST |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kreusa Hybrid Transport | 4 | +0 | 6/[3] | Computer 0, Cargo 1, Hybrid 2, Massive 2, Psi −1, Repair Bots 1 | - | @ | ••• | •••• |

one on each side, are a modified gill structure. Its only controls are a bioluminescent panel and a few sensitive nodules — flying in this somewhat fragile spacecraft is only a few steps short of a leap of faith.

**Self-Defense Implants:** The Perezistas oppose the consumption of other beings for sustenance, and many conflate that with pacifism. While Perezistas prefer peaceful coexistence, they are not fools, and are perfectly aware that not every ecosystem will be lacking in the apex predators that humanity has all but eliminated from Earth. Consequently, many Perezistas are prepared to defend themselves, both in a psychological and a literal sense. Perezista self-defense implants take many forms, from close-combat to ranged, from electroshock organs to envenomed needles spat or flung at a target.

Any biotech weapon of Size large or smaller may be reverse-engineered into a Perezista implant version. These weapons have a cost equal to • + the cost of the weapon in question. The implant always has the Concealable tag, even if the original weapon does not. Disarming the user requires surgery. **Tech:** @, **Tolerance:** •, **Cost:** ••-•••••

# QIN-MADE BIOTECH

The Qin recently introduced the following items for sale to humanity.

**Bioguard:** Roughly the size and shape of a large German Shepard, these creatures sometimes provide security to remote installations on Earth, but most are on colony worlds, where residents seek protection from threats they may not fully understand. These creatures have smooth skin like a salamander, a single large, featureless eye, four legs, no tail, two long slender arms rising from their shoulders, a biological taser pistol on their forehead, and a web emitter just below their mouth.

Their owner introduces them to all colony members or installation personnel, and the bioguard both protects them from harm and attempts to render first aid or carry the injured to safety. Bioguards possess a simple vocabulary and attempt to incapacitate or restrain anyone attempting to harm those under its care. They also attempt to drive off hostile or suspicious outsiders and escort non-hostile outsiders to someone in a position of authority. Bioguards are as intelligent as smart monkeys and can both understand simple words and speak a limited vocabulary.

## BIOGUARD (MEDIUM THREAT)

**Primary Pool:** 7 (guard)

**Secondary Pool:** 5 (render aid)

**Desperation Pool:** 3

**Defense:** 3

**Health:** 4

**Edges:** Hair Trigger Reflexes, Hardy 2, Keen Sense (smell), Swift

**Special Abilities**

**Enhanced Senses:** Bioguards possess the equivalent of EM Sight (**Trinity Continuum: Æon,** p. 228), along with exceptionally keen hearing, and a sense of smell that allows them to identity and track individuals.

**Built-In Weapons:** In addition to arms capable of grappling, bioguards possess built-in biological weaponry equal to a taser pistol and a web emitter carbine (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 280).

**Tech:** @, **Size:** Size 0, **Cost:** • •

**Builder Hive:** While biotech city seeds are wonders that can grow an amazing biotech metropolis from a few dozen automobile-sized seeds, they are expensive and take several years to complete. Some extrasolar colonies, and the vast majority of extrasolar research stations do not require this level of size or complexity, and so the Qin recently introduced an alternative. Looking like a clay wasp nest the size of a large automobile, builder hives contain more than a hundred builder bugs, each of which looks vaguely like a meter-long pill bug. Builder bugs have two functions, they take organic material into the hive to feed the hive, and they construct buildings.

Each builder bug can extrude layers of durable plastic-like material that can vary in color, texture, and opacity. This material is both fire-resistant and an excellent insulator. Users direct the hive from a small attached booth. They imagine the building or buildings they want and the hive constructs it. If the user provides them and indicates where they should go, the bugs can incorporate wiring and plumbing into the building, using short manipulators to move and arrange both. They can also include spaces for appliances, and can even make working doors, windows, and stairs. A single hive can create one comfortable house in two days, using a design, layout, and color scheme provided by the user. The speed of this construction doubles if colonists provide the hive with a supply of harvested organic materials, which can be as simple as cutting brush and leaving it next to the builder hive. **Tech:** @, **Size:** Size 2, **Cost:** ••••

**City Seeds:** Norça biotech researchers worked with Qin engineers to create the first true fully biotech city — the Brasilia bioarcology. Since then, Norça designers learned to build new bioarcologies on their own. However, the process is slow and complex. Individuals must plant each structure and a psion with at least one dot in biokinesis or vitakinesis must monitor their growth and development and help the disparate structures grow into a coherent

| WEAPON TYPE | EN | DMG TYPE | TAGS | TECH | FT | COST |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wrist Tools | 2 | Ballistic or Edged | Destructive, Formatted, Melee, Psi −1, Reach, Worn | @ | • | • • |

whole. Also, while Norça has a range of biotech matrices for creating different types of structures, and the psions who assist in their growth can adjust each structure's color, surface details, and final size, bioengineers must design and create any new styles of structure.

By adapting their own city-building technology, the Qin created a far simpler alternative — city seeds. Each seed grows into a settlement that can accommodate up to 5,000 people. Larger settlements require additional seeds. The practical limit on size is 10,000 seeds, which would create a city of 50 million people, but no one has yet attempted such a vast metropolis. Upon receiving payment, Qin designers create the city to the user's specifications, and provide the user with the seeds and planting instructions. Users must plant the seeds in a specific formation, but the seeds each contain bioluminescent patches that indicate where they must be planted in relation to one another. Once planted, they swiftly send up small shoots that display different colors to indicate what additional nutrients they require. If the user plants them correctly and provides the necessary additional food and water, they grow into a fully functional city within three years. Each seed is the size of a compact car. Purchasing sufficient seeds to create a city of up to 50,000 costs •••••, while larger settlements have a cost of L. **Tech:** @, **Size:** Size 2, **Cost:** ••••• or L

**Wrist Tools:** This device consists of a pair of form-fitting bracelets that are each 12 cm wide and 2 cm thick. Unlike most Qin technology, they require formatting and are otherwise useless. Once formatted, they can change shape, creating slender jointed limbs or flexible tentacles fitted with almost any hand tool, from screwdrivers and pliers, to drills, laser cutters, or even medical devices like scalpels and electro-cauterizers. This device is the equivalent of a fully equipped set of hand tools that surgeons, carpenters, and electronics technicians can also use instead of their normal handheld equipment. It provides 1 Enhancement to all rolls that require the use of any sort of hand tool, from disabling an electronic alarm system, to repairing a damaged minicomp, or suturing a cut. Wrist tools can also function as weapons, using either blades or laser cutters.

**Tech:** @, **Size:** Small, **Tolerance:** •, **Cost:** ••

# QIN-ONLY TECHNOLOGIES

The following technology is only available to Qin. In addition to not selling these devices or vehicles to humanity, Qin prevent any humans from examining them too closely, unless someone can convince the Qin to share these technologies with them. Even human characters with the Technological Permissions Edge (p. XX) can't access these devices unless the Storyguide decides otherwise.

**Bànlu — Qin Biocomps:** Qin biocomps, called "ewr-be" in the Qin's own language or more frequently Bànlu on Earth — Mandarin for "companion" — are dramatically different from their human counterparts in both form and function. These sapient bioapps resemble Earth octopuses around the same size as one of the small slug-like Qin, with nine prehensile, sucker-covered arms, a bulbous body with four equally spaced eyes around it, and a beaked mouth between the arms. Bànlu are amphibious and prefer warm, humid environments, functioning best between 10 and 50 degrees Celsius. They are roughly as intelligent as a smart gorilla or parrot, but more capable of using language and technology than either.

Like human SI agents, Bànlu supplement the Qin's abilities, perform searches and tedious functions on behalf of their Qin users, and proactively offer information and suggestions based on what the Bànlu knows of the Qin's preferences. Bànlu can also pilot Qin vehicles — including biosuits — if needed. In their fields of expertise, Bànlu behave so similarly to Qin that humans can barely tell the difference unless they can directly see the creature. Indeed, Qin sometimes send Bànlu in appropriate biosuits to engage with humans while masquerading as their Qin user. In these situations, humans rarely know they're not engaging with the Qin. Bànlu even have limited psionic ability to communicate with their Qin user and others, and perform their computing interface functions.

Qin who frequently make use of both biosuits and Bànlu — such as those on Earth — often modify their biosuits to include a secondary control receptacle for the Bànlu. This minor modification costs one upgrade point (p. XX) and allows the Qin to focus on other activities while the Bànlu "drives."

The same Qin must format both the Bànlu and the biosuit for it to be able to operate the biosuit.

Bànlu are capable of reproduction, carefully regulated by the Qin and controlled through specific chemical and pheromonal signals that trigger the reproductive cycle. Bànlu can reproduce sexually or asexually, depending on the signals. Asexual reproduction is akin to cloning; the Bànlu produces an offspring that rapidly matures over approximately one month and has perfect copies of all the original's expertise. Qin use this function to propagate effective Bànlu variants throughout their Houses.

Bànlu sexual reproduction is a considerably greater investment by the Qin, who choose it when they require a different set of skills or operating parameters from their biocomps. The Qin bring together two or more Bànlu with the desired traits, who deposit genetic material into a separate, specially designed incubation bioapp. The Qin telepathically control the incubator to specify the required parameters. The new biocomputer incubates for three months before the incubator ejects it. The newly born Bànlu is less than five centimeters long and requires nutrients and a hospitable environment to grow and mature over the next five months before it is ready to serve.

The most common research and general assistant Bànlu swap social and mind traits for their Primary and Secondary Pools. Bànlu rarely have body as a Primary or Secondary Pool, but some Houses — notably Kuei — maintain squads of combat-focused Bànlu to deploy in warrior biosuits as expendable shock troops if needed. These Bànlu have significantly different Edges and areas of expertise to the Bànlu here.

## BÀNLU (MINOR THREAT)

**Primary Pool:** 6 (Mind)

**Secondary Pool:** 4 (Social)

**Desperation Pool:** 2 (Body)

**Defense:** 3

**Health:** 3

**Edges:** Ambidextrous, Lightning Calculator 2, Photographic Memory 3, Speed Reading 1

**Psi Trait:** 2

**Psi Modes:** Mindshare 1, Psychbending 1, Telekinesis 1

**Equipment Bonuses:** +2 Enhancement in three areas of expertise (use the Applications under Popular Agents, **Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 286 for common selections). As sapient creatures, Bànlu learn from experience and can develop more areas of expertise over time.

**Biocomp:** Bànlu have all the equivalent functionality of human biocomps (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 284), with a failsafe rating of 6. A Bànlu can switch its wireless OpNet signal off or on with a reflexive action and can attempt to hack any device it can access through this OpNet connection or via physical contact.

**Telepresence:** Qin formatted to the Bànlu are always in a Network (Mindshare • ) with the Qin who formatted it, as long as the Bànlu is within the Qin's Attunement range. If a formatted user knows Possess (Psychbending • • • • ) it can use this to take over the Bànlu for only one Psi point, though the Qin must succeed in an activation roll for the power as normal. Tech: @, Size: Size 0, Tolerance: • , Cost: • • (for Qin only)

**Healing Pod:** This large oval pod opens like an oyster, and can accommodate a single Qin inside of it. The patient must climb inside, and a Qin (or potentially a human psion trained in its use) operator must spend 2 Psi points and make a Psi + Medicine roll. A Specialty in Qin medicine is required for any non-Qin to attempt this roll. This device duplicates the effects of the Vitakinesis power Restore Template (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 261), using the results of the roll to operate the device. Unlike the Restore Template power, this device requires 10 minutes per Condition cured. The operator does not need to format this device.

With minor adjustments, Qin physicians can use healing pods on other life forms native to Qinshui, and with some modifications they could also use these devices on humans. These modifications require approximately one hour and a Difficulty 3 Psi + Technology roll. Currently, Qin researchers are considering releasing a version of this pod modified for use on humans. Humans who encounter this device may be surprised, because while most Qin biotech is exceptionally advanced, their ability to duplicate psionic powers they do not possess is somewhat limited. **Tech:** @, **Size:** Size 1, **Cost:** ••• (for Qin only)

**Mycelia-pods:** Mycelia-pods are part of the Qin terraforming arsenal, bringing the familiar plants of Qinshui to whatever planet the Qin settle upon. Mycelia-pods appear as tightly woven packets of brightly colored microfiber threads the size and shape of pumpkin seeds. Each colored thread denotes a different kind of Qin plant — single colored weaves produce only that type of plant, whereas multicolored tapestries contain the potential for a suite of co-supporting companion plants.

When placed on soil, regardless of quality, the mycelia-pod's threads begin to unravel, insinuating themselves into the dirt, giving the illusion of burying the pod as the threads disperse. The threads expand outwards and begin branching to build a subterranean web over a 100 meters in diameter. This requires around 12 hours, after which the filaments begin to sprout whatever plants they contain. These plants grow at optimum spacing for their final size from others in the pod, depending on the species. The mycelia-pods pulse vitakinesis growth-boosting effects through the web to promote rapid and strong growth, but also channel Algesis effects to destroy any competing plants, parasites, or pathogens that might interfere with the pod's growth. Plants produced from mycelia-pods grow at least five times faster than their naturally occurring counterparts and thrive even under poor conditions as long as they have the basic requirements for survival. Even without nutrients or water, the mycelia-pod's web remains dormant for years, ready to flourish when conditions improve.

Formatted mycelia-pods grow even more aggressively. A formatted mycelia-pod fed one Psi point per day will grow in any soil regardless of toxicity, suitability to the plant, or availability of nutrients. The formatted mycelial web beneath the surface slowly transforms the soil to be more conducive to Qin lifeforms. As long as mycelia-pods receive a steady diet of Psi points, they will continue to transform the world around them. Tung Jen ships carry stores of mycelia-pods ready to distribute on planets the Qin desire to colonize.

The Qin controlling the bioapp can specify the precise order and rates of growth of each plant within a pod, as well as dictating the size and shape of the plant. Qin from Houses Hsien, Ken, Kun, and Qian enjoy competing with each other to produce the most aesthetically pleasing and artistic gardens from their mycelia-pods. The Qin are considering selling mycelia-pod technology to humanity — it could do much to assist various ravaged areas on Earth — but have so far balked for two reasons. Firstly, the pods are specific to building Qin-desired conditions and haven't been adapted to human needs or plant-life. Secondly, soil altered by mycelia-pods is inimical to natural plants for decades afterwards. The Qin are concerned that humans would initially see these bioapps as a blessing, but then resent their Qin allies when they learn that nothing else will grow on the location within their lifetimes. **Tech:** @, **Size:** Tiny, **Tolerance:** • per hundred pods, **Cost:** • (for Qin only)

## QIN VEHICLES

Qin regularly use all the following vehicles, but will not allow humans to purchase or even study them. All these vehicles use Qin gravito-magnetic propulsion, which acts as a reactionless drive, but loses power the further the vessel is from a star's gravitational and magnetic fields.

**Qin Personal Transport:** This small vehicle can carry a single Qin, who uses it exactly as if it was a biosuit. It is also the smallest craft with gravito-magnetic propulsion that the Qin can create. Although it is too small to carry much cargo, it can lift and manipulate heavy objects with its two sturdy tentacles, which each branch into four thinner tendrils. It resembles a two-meter-long squid that floats in the air, except that it has a glowing, undulating fringe on either side and the upper portion of the squid's body is a transparent canopy that holds the driver. The back of this flying biosuit contains a separate compartment capable of carrying one piece of Size 0 cargo or several smaller items. On Qinshui and other Qin worlds, Qin often use these vehicles instead of humanoid biosuits. This vehicle can accept any biosuit upgrade (p. XX) that all three types of humanoid biosuits can use.

The Qin personal transport possesses the following biosuit features:

- Armor with the Camouflage 1, Complete, Environmental 1, Hard 1, Soft 1
- The vision enhancement augmentation (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 289)
- Enhanced Physique (p. XX)

**Qin Aircar:** These small bean-shaped vehicles are the most common type of rapid transport vessel on Qinshui. Versions capable of carrying large amounts of cargo or passengers, but are slightly less

## QIN VEHICLES TABLE

| TYPE | SIZE | HANDLING | SPEED | TAGS | WEAPONS | TECH | FT | COST |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Qin Personal Transport | 1 | +1 | 4 | Armor 1, Computer 0, Fast 2, Flight Systems 0, Living 0, Maneuverable 1, Psi −1, Tools 1 | - | @ | • | • • |
| Qin Aircar | 2 | +1 | 6 | Computer 0, Fast 4, Flight Systems 0, Living 0, Maneuverable 1, Massive 1, Psi −1 | - | @ | - | • • • |
| Qin Planetary Transport | 4 | 0 | 6 [5] | Armor 1, Cargo 3, Computer 0, Hybrid 2, Living 0, Massive 2, Psi −1, Thrusters 2 | - | @ | - | L |
| Qin Starship | 6 | -2 | [6] | Armor 2, Astrogation Systems, Cargo 5, Complex, Computer 0, Crew −3, Living 0, Massive 3, Psi −1, Sluggish −2, Thrusters 3, Weaponry 1 | Laser Carbine | @ | - | L |

maneuverable (add the Cargo 1 tag and remove the Maneuverable tag) are also quite common as is a version that possesses four long sturdy tentacles for moving and carrying heavy objects (add the Cargo 1 and Tools tags, remove the Maneuverable tag, and reduce the Speed to 5).

**Qin Planetary Transport:** Qin use these spacecraft to transport passengers and cargo between worlds in a single star system, and as landing craft from Qin starships. They are elegant, organic-looking disk-shaped crafts.

**Qin Starship:** While no human has yet been onboard one of these vast and majestic vessels, observers have seen them arrive and depart from the Qin star system, and clairsentients have scanned them. Qin starships are all roughly the same. They are living biotech creations almost two kilometers long and use a much larger and more powerful version of the same gravito-magnetic drives as other Qin spacecraft. When entering or leaving a star system, their drives interact with the local gravitational and magnetic fields producing accelerations well above that possible for human spacecraft without the need for any reaction mass.

However, the further from a star system the vessel goes, the lower its acceleration becomes, dropping to 0.01 Gs a tenth of a light year from a star. However, these ships reach speeds of approximately 70% of the speed of light, allowing them to travel to any of the Qin interstellar colonies in no more than a few decades. Each ship carries vast amounts of cargo, as well as many thousands of passengers stored in hibernation. They typically carry three Qin planetary transports as landing craft.

# LISTENER TECHNOLOGIES

The Listeners are a technological species, roughly on par with early 21st-century humans with some variations — they are far more experienced in controlled breeding and biotech than metallurgy, for example. On some fronts, however, they've made progress humans haven't even considered.

**Listener Mindweaves:** The Listeners do not employ mechanical AI, and indeed, their grasp of digital computing is not particularly advanced. Instead, Listeners employ the mindweave, a tightly interwoven braid of surgically extracted Listener neural cysts that Listener biotechnicians cause to replicate and place in a cellular framework in a lab. The cysts grow together, following the framework and developing into a highly ordered mind. Listeners keep them alive in a specialized nutrient-rich solution.

These mindweaves are not self-aware, but excel at calculation and multitasking to a degree that eludes even Listeners. The typical interface is a lengthy plank of artificial coral-capped cilia, but recent advances have led to constructing mindweaves with the ability to hear and respond through an artificial larynx.

A mindweave is effectively the equivalent of a high-quality Agent. They are capable of learning and adapting themselves to new tasks with relative ease. Instead of installing applications, users must train mindweaves to perform certain tasks. Because mindweaves are nearly a meter long and require a life-support apparatus, they are not especially portable. **Tech:** @, **Size:** Size 0, **Tolerance:** n/a, **Cost:** ••••

**Listener Scrying Pool:** Similar to the ARES pod, the Listener scrying pool is a carefully cultivated environment that assists in long-range scanning with clairsentient abilities. Each scrying pool is a unique work of art, and monastic orders often take great pride in their design and ornamentation, but ultimately all function in the same way. Most are a little less than a meter deep, allowing Listeners to partially immerse themselves and breathe the warm, highly oxygenated water, which is so saturated with symbiotic microorganisms that most humans can float in it without difficulty.

Used alone, the pool provides +1 Enhancement for all clairsentient abilities, and raises a character's effective Psi by 1 for the purposes of determining power and range. When used in conjunction with other clairsentients (Listener or human), the pool obviates the need to spend additional Psi when using powers in conjunction with others. The psion leading the scan increases their effective Psi by 1 for every participant, to a maximum of her current Tier restriction — this does not stack with the bonus for using the pool alone. It also multiplies the maximum range for clairsentient powers by 50 times for each participant; unlike the ARES pod, this functions in conjunction with Psychometry and Psychocognition powers, allowing psions to easily investigate the past or divine the future of distant locations. Other psions may participate in the ritual and perceive the scan in a shared trance, but only clairsentients increase the Psi and range bonus. Pools vary in size, but the majority can serve up to five Listeners or humans. **Tech:** @, **Size:** 2, **Tolerance:** •• per participant, **Cost:** •••••

# ALIEN RELICS AND TECHNOLOGIES

The following section contains descriptions of various alien relics explorers discovered in the course of their missions.

## ARTIFACTS FOUND ON ALCIN-PLASI

Explorers can discover these relics on the Qin extrasolar colony of Alcin-Plasi (p. XX).

**The Alien Base:** The alien base located near Alcin-Plasi's "cold pole" is roughly four million years old and in ruins, but Psychometry can provide some information about the aliens. The aliens looked like six-legged land-dwelling octopi with rigid heads that could walk on their tentacles. They were also obviously psychic, and clears will perceive the aliens flying telekinetically and occasionally teleporting.

In addition, anyone who experiences a vision of these aliens who has had contact with one of the Doyen (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 359) gains a vague sense that the aliens are somehow familiar. If the character ever thinks about the aliens and the Doyen, they realize that these two species are similar or related. In actuality, the aliens are what they Doyen were like before they became creatures of psionic energy and electrically charged plasma.

Also, any clear who specifically looks for more information about the Doyen and succeeds at a Psychometry roll with a Difficulty of 5 (because the Doyen attempted to cover up traces of their visit) perceives a vision of modern Doyen visiting these ruins roughly 12,000 years ago. They teleport in carrying a Qin captive and proceed to alter its memories and its mind. This vision provides clear evidence that the Doyen have been interfering with the Qin.

Finally, while the vast majority of the equipment in the base decayed into uselessness hundreds of thousands of years ago, one small wonder remains. If the characters search the base carefully, they eventually find a silvery ovoid. It is impenetrable to all attacks and all psychic powers, because the base's original inhabitants placed this container and its contents in temporal stasis, so that no time passed

for either the ovoid or its contents. However, any telepath or clear who touches the ovoid and thinks anything like "open" instantly causes the ovoid to cease being reflective.

At this point, the ovoid is a metalloplastic container with an obvious lid. It is not locked, and inside is a pair of identical slender silvery rings that are each roughly 13 cm in diameter. Spending 1 Psi point while holding either ring activates them both. For the next three minutes, the rings are a part of linked portals, so looking through one allows you to see out the other, and anything pushed through one comes out the other. At the end of the three minutes, the view through the rings starts to shimmer, and unless the user spends another Psi point, the portal closes in 10 seconds and forcibly pushes anything partway through out. The rings function as long as they are no more than 0.1 light years apart.

## ARTIFACTS FOUND ON BULLSEYE

Archeologists have found or might find the following artifacts on Bullseye.

**Eyeglass:** Eyeglass is a composite created with ground-down glass from the reflective plains of Bullseye. Eyeglass is saturated with strange energies that distort and disrupt noetic powers, and sheets or layers of the material can protect a room from psionic influence. It's not foolproof, but the noetic interference presents a significant problem for a psion trying to affect the warded location, not to mention providing a deeply unpleasant, discordant static in their mind as part of the process.

Eyeglass isn't really a relic of the Bullseye entities, except inasmuch as that any given pane of the material likely includes the vitrified remains of several who perished during the devastating impacts that created the glass plains. This substance is an entirely human invention, spurred by the discovery that the sandstorms off the plains interfered with psionic activity. Although the media largely focuses on the xenoarchaeological finds from the planet, eyeglass is the greatest prize for the expedition's backers — a disruptive product that'll rapidly find a serious market, with many hundreds of square kilometers of material literally lying there on Bullseye's surface.

Eyeglass production aligns the crystalline structure of the Bullseye glass particles to focus and strengthen their noetic interference. A centimeter-thick layer of eyeglass raises the Difficulty of an attempt to influence it or reach past it with a psionic power by 3; doubling the thickness raises that to 4, but additional layers do little to reinforce the disruption any further. As well as the unpleasant mental static, a room coated in eyeglass appears like the rainbow iridescence of a soap bubble to clairsentient observation.

The substance only blocks power use that would pass through it to reach the target, rather than generally disrupting noetics in the wider area. Fully protecting a room requires a layer of eyeglass running through its floor, ceiling, walls, and door. It also doesn't prevent or inhibit the use of psionics within the warded area — although a psion trying to reach outside such a room with their powers suffers the same interference.

A pair of companies in the FSA and UAN has only just begun producing eyeglass within the last month. Neither can start full scale production due to the small amount of glass that researchers have retrieved from Bullseye. Most of the existing samples are prototypes, developed and presented to potential military and governmental buyers, but several metacorporations and wealthy private individuals have already expressed an interest.

**Grub Seed Munition:** An example of how horrific the final stages of fighting that overtook Bullseye must have been, the seed munition is a Grub weapon launched like a rocket-propelled grenade. While archaeologists have yet to recover any examples of the launchers, someone could theoretically load a seed munition into a custom-made rocket and fire it from a human-manufactured launcher instead. Xenoarcheologists have recovered several seed munitions from ruined cities thus far. Despite the passage of time, experts judge them intact enough that they could still detonate with full effect.

When a seed munition detonates, it exudes a toxic gas loaded with deadly organic nanotechnology. Once deployed, whether by a launcher or direct activation, it spills the gas in a cloud with the Explosive 2 and Poison tags. Anyone who suffers injury due to the Poison tag is exposed to the living nanomachines, which immediately set to work within their body. Physicians can treat the burns and rashes caused by the toxic gas normally, and the nanomachines initially show no signs of their activity.

Over a period of between several hours and one day, the nanomachines use the victim's own tissues to build small fragmentation devices in their flesh,

drawing metals and chemicals from blood, bone, and internal organs. This process becomes increasingly painful as the invasion progresses. Medical examination reveals grape-like lumps emerging like tumors, surrounded by small regions of necrotic tissue. Once the seeding matures, the devices detonate.

For the hapless victim, this is the equivalent of being hit by an Enhancement 5 weapon with the Aggravated, Brutal, and Deadly tags. Worn armor offers no protection from the internal explosion. It also sprays the surrounding area with fragments of metal and bone, as per an Enhancement 3 weapon with the Explosive tag.

As best anyone can discern, attackers used this nightmarish device as a terror weapon against the Bullseye entities, presumably so that wounded individuals seeded by the munition would later erupt and sow further havoc among those who came to administer medical care to them. Vitakinetic Mending can swiftly and easily destroy these nanomachines and eliminate any damage they create, preventing them from detonating. Also, vitakinetics and biokinetics with one or more dots of Adaptation are immune to the nanomachines. Shortly after their discovery, researchers on Bullseye begin working on a biotech "vaccine" to prevent these nanomachines from replicating in a victim, but this process will require an intact weapon to analyze as well as several months of work.

**Quad Lock:** Archaeologists dug several dozen copies of this relic out of a single Bullseye ruin, believed to be either a prison or a monastery based on its layout and design. The quad locks cause scientists to lean towards prison: they're sets of four cuffs, sized and linked appropriately for the Bullseye entities' four-armed form. What makes them unusual is the strange alloy used in their creation, still emitting odd frequencies of exotic energy even 200,0000 years later.

The Bullseye natives faced the problem of how to restrict and contain members of society when everyone was capable of at least some level of quantum power. The quad locks are at least part of the answer, as they help suppress the quantum powers of anyone locked into them. A character restrained in quad locks has their effective Corruption rating reduced by 1; this does not deny them any existing Qualities or Mutations, nor does it render a Corruption 1 character completely free of quantum influence. The effects of multiple quad locks are not cumulative.

Of the quad locks recovered, three-quarters are too mangled, corroded, or otherwise damaged by time to be of much use. It may be possible to salvage the unusual material used in their construction, however, to create new copies from the components. Preliminary tests indicate that quad locks do not cure Quantum Flux diseases or allow vitakinetics to cure them, but they may prevent these diseases from progressing.

## HEXER ARTIFACTS

Researchers have discovered the following artifacts on Ivdel.

**Cheat Drive:** Over Ivdel, both the Hexer colony vessel and the attacking starship were severely damaged before human explorers could examine them. Enough debris remains, however, for engineers to analyze the things believed to be their interstellar drive systems. These raise more questions than they answer and are among the foremost evidence of the Hexers' superior knowledge of applied physics.

Preliminary examination suggests that cheat drives generate a field that reduces the ship's mass and inertia. In actuality, this drive reduced both by a factor of 2,500, permitting the ship to use a relatively small reaction drive that requires little reaction mass in order to achieve relativistic speeds. In addition to this drive, both ships also used gas core fission rockets considerably more primitive than modern hyperfusion rockets. In combination with one another, the rockets and the cheat drive allowed both vessels to reach speeds of almost 90% of the speed of light.

To date, humanity's knowledge of cheat drives is theoretical, gained from a mixture of forensic engineering and Psychometry. Reconstructing this drive from scattered wreckage is impossible, but researchers now have valuable clues for learning how the cheat drive functions. Some investigators have, very quietly, bemoaned the absence of quantakinetics, whose unique Modes would no doubt yield key insights into this and other Hexer technology.

Grav Sleds: Ivdel has yielded dozens of examples of Hexer vehicles, many still in working condition. Body styles and sizes range from single-Hexer minimalist designs of apparent recreational purpose to a cargo van the size of a small hybrid shuttle. All use what researchers believe to be a simpler variant of the cheat drive used by Hexer starships. These vehicles reduce the mass and inertia of the vehicle they are attached to by a factor of roughly 50.

Given the vehicle's low apparent mass, the vehicles' surprisingly inefficient vectored-thrust turbofans easily provide both lift and propulsion. The result is a family of vehicles that test pilots have described as behaving like three-dimensional air hockey pucks: swift in a straight line, quick to change direction, yet imprecise at any speed above a few meters per second.

The Hexer body plan and sensory systems don't make for comfortable human conveyances. So far, electrokinetics have handled most grav sled testing, but an Australian engineering team has extensively modified one small passenger vehicle for human hands, eyes, and seating. OpNet coverage of the latter endeavor, released as episodic holovids, is wildly popular. There is significant demand for the UN to release this example of alien technology for commercial reverse-engineering.

**Hexer Computers:** Hexer computing technology represents a frustrating enigma for researchers on Ivdel. Many Hexers possessed personal computing devices roughly analogous to a modern minicomp, albeit relying on wired rather than wireless connections to all outside devices. It's uncertain whether this was a security standard or, given Hexers' own sensory organs, a user safety concern. However, while many of these devices remain functional, none of them are usable — or even intelligible — for human researchers. Even electrokinetics can't effectively interface with these devices or extract usable information from their high-density crystalline storage media.

Disturbingly, however, while electrokinetics can tantalizingly sense vast arrays of information just out of reach, so can telepaths. EKs describe accessing a Hexer computer as trying to juggle one more flaming torch than proprioception and self-preservation allow. Telepaths who've encountered powered-on Hexer computers say the experience is akin to having invisible auctioneers with flat affect whispering in their ears in a foreign language. Both parties agree that something is just out of reach — and profoundly, yet subliminally, wrong.

The working theory is that for Hexers, who natively operated in base 16, computer engineering and neurology were related fields. Engineers believe the computers mimic Hexers' own neural architecture, limited to just below the threshold of sentience. Factoring in organic electromagnetic sensitivity and transmission capabilities, it's possible that the Hexer computer interface had more in common with telepathy than with any human data input or display technologies.

Outside these personal devices, though, embedded computing technology was rare on Ivdel. It appeared only in critical infrastructure, medical technology, and some of the larger grav sleds. There's no evidence of manufacturing capability for this technology, so every computer on-world came with the colony vessel and is a legacy of the original settlers.

The last research element in this area is the Mantes. Their controlling systems are recognizably based on the same technology but are more advanced and subtly different. An ongoing debate exists between electrokinetics, telepaths, and clairsentients as to whether there's the faintest hint of quantum Corruption in the few intact cores.

Despite their ability to *almost* sense Hexer computing devices, neither telepaths nor clairsentients can actually access them. Any electrokinetic attempt to interface with these artifacts incurs a 4 Difficulty

## THE HEXER TECHNOLOGICAL BASE

Hexer technology is far in advance of humanity's in several areas, most notably applied physics involving the electromagnetic spectrum and gravity. However, in other fields, Ivdel's Hexers lagged far behind Earth. They lacked hyperfusion, instead using fission reactors as the energy-generating infrastructure for both ships and colonial settlements, with hydrogen fuel cells providing most portable power. Their materials science is likewise most of a century behind humanity's, with no sign of large-scale microgravity fabrication of modern crystalline alloys. The items selected for inclusion here represent the most innovative or interesting discoveries on Ivdel, not necessarily the Hexer baseline.

It's also notable that the only identifiable purpose-built weapons found on Ivdel are those of the Mantes. The Hexers appear to have made certain their colony contained no weapons. However, during the Hexer attack, desperation resulted in many interesting improvisations that researchers are still cataloguing and rendering safe.

with a level 2 Complication: neglecting to buffer the attempt with meditation, anti-seizure medication, or a safety bioapp inflicts the Stunned Condition on a failure. Failure to buy off the Complication leaves the electrokinetic with a severe headache.

## Artifacts Found on Yarran

Characters visiting the world of Yarran can find the following artifacts.

**Coalition ZP Power Cells:** Despite the Yarra having forcibly landed the Ark more than seven centuries ago, the Coalition Ark on Yarran is in remarkably good shape. Civil war between Coalition factions and the elements have damaged or destroyed portions, and sasqs scavenged other sections for spare parts to keep the Coalition's few advanced weapons and vehicles functional, but much of the ship is at least partially intact. More importantly, a few crucial sections even possess limited emergency power. The source of the Coalition's power is also the reason it is still functional. Personal vehicles and other large devices made using advanced Coalition technology contain miniature hyperfusion reactors, while small portable devices with limited power requirements used high density batteries. However, the Ark and all other Coalition spacecraft use zero point (ZP) power cells, which draw vast amounts of energy from fluctuations in the vacuum of space.

The ZP cells powering the Ark's massive engines are the size of a small arcology, but they ceased functioning when the Yarra forced the Ark to land, as did most of the Ark's other equally large primary ZP cells. However, some of the localized emergency ZP power nodes survived the landing, and a handful continue to function at reduced output. Most of these emergency power nodes are ovoids with a volume of slightly more than two cubic meters. Each ZP node can produce sufficient electricity to power a large town. Anyone studying them will realize that they can provide power for centuries without any need for fuel and that they produce approximately 1,000 times as much power as a comparably sized hyperfusion reactor.

ZP cells are also the key to the fact that the Coalition's ships are faster and have a considerably higher acceleration than anything humanity or the Qin can create. Although the Ark's engines ceased working long ago, they are sufficiently intact so that anyone who gains access to the rear portion of the ruins of this vast spacecraft can learn their secrets. Coalition vessels collect interstellar hydrogen using enormous magnetic scoop fields, and direct it into the Ark's engines, where the ZP cells accelerate the hydrogen plasma to 99.999% the speed of light. As a result, the Ark's engines are remarkably simple and robust in design, and only function because of the significant energies provided by the ship's primary ZP cells. While they can learn a moderate amount by examining the Ark's ZP cells, characters may want to remove one or more for further study. Unfortunately, in addition to being heavy Size 2 objects in the middle of a decaying starship, Coalition phyle will all strenuously object to outsiders taking their valuable technology. Also, even if the characters manage to acquire one or more ZP cells, these devices remain several centuries beyond the ability for humanity to duplicate. While studying them provides valuable research, they cannot be reverse-engineered by anyone except possibly an inhumanly intelligent Aberrant inventor.

**Other Surviving Technology:** The local Coalition phyle have also managed to keep almost 100 gamma rifles (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 350) working, and they also possess 16 small aircars and seven large aircars. These aircars are typical examples of the Coalition's high-tech brute force approach to technology. They use extremely powerful miniature hyperfusion reactors and internal ducted fans to propel the vehicles at nearly the speed of sound. However, because all of these vehicles have been repaired many times over the last seven centuries, they now all have a top Speed of 4, but this Speed would rise to 5, if they were fully repaired, which skilled human engineers and technicians could manage, using a well-equipped workshop, like the ones available on a Leviathan jump ship. The small aircars seat up to six, while the large aircars carry a driver, a gunner, and either 20 passengers, a modest amount of cargo, or some mixture of the two.

## Coalition Vehicles

**The Yarra Plazas:** The now-vanished Yarra were powerful psychics and almost all their technology was based on noetic living crystalline technology far in advance of anything humanity or even the Qin could create or understand. When they transcended the physical universe, they took all these devices with them, as well as all local life forms. As a result, their cities are strangely empty, and the entire continent they inhabited is almost devoid of life.

However, they left three identical artifacts behind, each of which is in a different one of their three largest cities. Each artifact is a circular plaza 50 meters across, made from an optically smooth opalescent stone-like material that is completely untouched by the centuries, and cannot be damaged or even scratched by any portable weapons or tools except plasma throwers and missile launchers. Any psion within 10 km of one of the plazas who succeeds at a Psi + highest Mode check immediately notices the plaza as a significant psychic anomaly.

Any psion who possesses 2 or more dots in Psychometry who uses any form of Clairsentience while standing on one of these plazas experiences an intense and prolonged psychometric vision. This vision lasts slightly more than an hour and during this time the clairsentient and anyone in mental contact with them remain unconscious. Even vitakinetics cannot awaken these individuals, but they are also clearly suffering no medical problems or distress.

This vision provides them with a staggering amount of information about Yarra life and culture. The Yarra deliberately created visions as a way to

| TYPE | SIZE | HANDLING | SPEED | TAGS | WEAPONS | TECH | COST |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Small Coalition Aircar | 2 | +0 | 4 (5 *) | Armor 1, Computer 0, Fast 2 (3 *), Flight Systems 0, Massive 1 | - | Hard | n/a |
| Large Coalition Aircar | 2 | +0 | 4 (5 *) | Armor 2, Cargo 1, Computer 0, Fast 2 (3 *), Flight Systems 0, Massive 1 | Gamma Ray Laser | Hard | n/a |

* Speed if repaired.

share their history with later species, but they specifically do not include any information about how Yarra technology operates or how the Yarra created any of it. Instead, these visions provide information about their history and daily life, as well as hints about their fate. It includes information about transcendence, combined with a definite sense that only species who have evolved sufficiently far can manage this feat.

However, this information is highly compressed. The plazas effectively deliver an amount of information similar to that provided in a thorough introductory college course on a particular culture in less than 70 minutes. Because the vision contains so much information and the Yarra are exceedingly alien, no one experiencing it will come away with more than a somewhat fragmentary scattering of the information provided. Clairsentients can experience these visions repeatedly, but multiple "viewings" have only limited benefit, because much of the limitation in understanding or even fully perceiving these visions is due to the alien nature of the Yarra.

# ZEP RELICS

The Zeps left behind not only an enormous installation in Mgitu's atmosphere, but left it strewn with tools and devices that scientists are still trying to understand. Unfortunately, psionic exploration can only get so far, and a true understanding of the following devices may only come with physical exploration of the cavernous structure.

**Brindle:** These amorphous semisolids are roughly the size of a large melon, change color and pattern according to various environmental factors, and have a habit of wandering around if left to their own devices. Despite being mobile and seeming alive to both biokinetic and vitakinetic scans, they are not — or at least, not in any way recognizable to humans. They don't seem to eat, eliminate waste, or reproduce, and as best as observation can determine they don't have any kind of a cellular structure. Instead, they seem to consist of a uniform unknown polymer.

Brindles cannot be formatted, but absorb exotic energies in their immediate presence, meaning that psions could use one as a reservoir for up to five Psi points. However, brindles will also happily absorb quantum energies, and while this may be useful in cleaning up small Quantum Flux zones or potentially even curing Quantum Flux diseases, no one is entirely sure what to do with the contaminated brindle afterwards. A quantakinetic could siphon and transform the Quantum Flux, but few quantakinetics will reveal their powers to do so. Brindles have no effect on Aberrants, who channel Quantum Flux in far larger quantities than any brindle could consume, and researchers suspect they cannot use them to cure sub-Aberrant mutants on their own, but might work as part of a larger treatment plan. **Tech:** Unknown, **Size:** 0, **Cost:** Priceless

**Copycube:** These cubes are the color of eggshell, 19 centimeters to a face, and apparently immutable. Those handling them report a sense of communion with dozens, perhaps hundreds of minds. Telepaths can filter the information, and contact individual minds. At first, none are human, but as studies continue, telepaths begin discovering human minds in the mix — the minds of those who had previously handled the cubes, snapshotted at the moment they touched it.

Copycubes create an image of all the conscious and unconscious thoughts any sentient entity was thinking the moment it touched the device. Telepaths can access these thoughts, but discovered that they possess no consciousness or self-awareness, they are only a scattershot of recorded thoughts. Most copycubes contain a chorus of alien thoughts, presumably from Zeps, who defy comprehension even by highly trained telepaths. **Tech:** Unknown, **Size:** Large, **Tolerance:** None, **Cost:** Priceless

**Fascinator:** This baseball-sized pitted sphere is completely uninteresting and unremarkable when captured on video, but when visually perceived directly (including through clairsentience) it puts observers into a kind of catatonic state until the object leaves their field of view. It seems to drift according to its own whims even in gravitational fields. They appear to be hollow and show up as living things to biokinetics and vitakinetics who scan them. Any character visually encountering a fascinator suffers a level 5 Complication ("Fascinated") until someone removes the fascinator from their field of vision. **Tech:** Unknown, **Size:** Medium, **Tolerance:** None, **Cost:** Priceless

## OTHER ALIEN TECHNOLOGIES AND RELICS

In the course of their missions, explorers from both Upeo wa Macho and the Æon Trinity can discover relics that do not belong to any known civilization. Characters could find these in an ancient wrecked alien spacecraft or on a base that unknown aliens used and abandoned before humans discovered agriculture. Some of these objects may serve as clues to finding the species that created them, but others are simply relics of civilizations that vanished long ago.

**Atmospheric Dome:** This tiny device looks like an irregular ovoid with 18 input buttons marked in an unknown language. With experimentation, users learn that three of the symbols are for rain, clouds, and wind — with the rest relating to temperature, wind speed and direction, and atmospheric composition. Once someone enters a command into the control device, the item projects a dome covering an area 30 meters in diameter, under which the atmosphere changes to whatever conditions the user entered — from different localized weather to a small spot of breathable air. The presets on the device are designed for the comfort of an extinct alien race, with no wind, a temperature of 40° C, and high humidity. The air pressure is similar to Earth's and possesses toxic levels of carbon dioxide, but is breathable using a biofilter. An enterprising character can reset the values to be useable to humans and Qin. This device registers a faint and entirely harmless degree of Quantum Flux.

Using the control device is a simple action, and the dome centers on the character holding the control. The dome contains keeps gases inside and outside from mixing, and it does not prevent people, objects, or even dust or other particulates from entering or leaving. However, it grants +2 Enhancement to any rolls to resist airborne irritants and toxins. **Tech:** Quantum, **Size:** Small, **Cost:** Priceless

**Map of the Stars:** Uncovered during a survey of a potentially habitable world, the Map of the Stars is an immense star-map permanently carved into the bedrock of the planet. This 400-meter-diameter creation is no rudimentary map created by a primitive people but an incredibly detailed, exceedingly precise map containing not just the origin planet's location and system but also several hundred neighboring solar systems as well. Small changes in the position of stars indicates that its creators made it between two and three thousand years ago. Several of the planets in other star systems possess special marks like the mark next to the image of the planet the map is on, possibly indicating the location of other alien relics.

**Power Spirals:** Found buried amid ruins, these devices are a set of seven metallic resembling giant three-meter-long springs. Despite their impressive size, the spirals weigh relatively little. Once characters fully excavate them, they can move the springs fairly easily. When arranged in the appropriate pattern, the seemingly inert spirals vibrate with tremendous energy, creating a field between them that restores power to any battery placed at the approximate center of the pattern of spirals. Once the battery has reached a full charge, the spirals return to an inert state. After a user correctly arranges the spirals, pushing firmly on any of them begins the charging process. The spirals must rest for several hours before anyone can use them again.

A character must make an Enigmas + Might roll at Difficulty 2 to arrange the spirals. After succeeding on this roll, the strange artifacts generate a field which can fully recharge any battery, even the large ones used to power vehicles. **Tech:** Unknown, **Size: Size 0 (each)**, **Cost:** Priceless

**Reactive Pigments:** Found in the broken hull of a long-forgotten crashed spacecraft, the reactive pigments are a set of a dozen pots containing multicolored liquid. Like paint or ink, individuals can use the pigments to write or draw in color on most surfaces, including skin. Reactive pigments respond to proximal sapient thought, spontaneously shifting colors and creating vibrant, unusual patterns that have a deep psychological effect on the viewer. It remains uncertain if their creators intended the pigments to be a primary means of communication, but their effect on the social attitudes of both human and Qin is undeniable. A clairsentient who is within Short range of the pigments can detect weak noetic energies emanating from them.

Writing or drawing with the reactive pigments within Close range of a character reveals an abstract statement of their current emotions, giving everyone able to see the pigments who has studied how they interact with thoughts and emotions +1 Enhancement to Empathy rolls to influence that individual. **Tech:** @, **Size:** Medium, **Cost:** Priceless

Although anyone can learn these Edges, they are particularly common among explorers, interstellar colonists, and individuals who interact with aliens.

## ADAPTABLE (◦◦◦)

**Prerequisite:** Stamina ••, Survival ••

The character's innate biology, whether through the gift of good genes or specific modifications, is notably resistant to environmental dangers. This Edge may also represent specific training for dealing with the elements and the hazards of alien worlds. Once per scene, the character may spend a point of Momentum to add this Edge's rating in Enhancement to any Survival roll made to resist exposure, environmental hazards, or the dangers of an alien atmosphere.

## (ALIEN) PARTNERSHIP (◦)

**Prerequisite:** Empathy ••

The character finds it easy to establish relationships with a particular alien species: maybe she smells good, maybe her body language is especially appealing, and maybe she just treats all other intelligent creatures like equals and individuals. When purchasing this Edge, select one of the following species: Chromatic, Coalition, Listener, or Qin. The character can adjust the Attitude of her chosen alien social encounter by one in either direction (though usually in her favor). Additionally, whenever she develops a Bond with the chosen alien character, she adds 1 to its initial rating. A character may purchase this Edge multiple times, once for each species. Qin can also purchase this Edge for humans.

## BIOTECH SAVANT ◦◦◦◦◦

**Prerequisite:** Psions only, Cunning or Intellect ••••• •, Orgotek, Chitra Bhanu, or Science-related Path, Science ••, and Technology ••

Your character excels at both understanding and creating cutting-edge biotech, and is also exceptionally able to understand alien biotech, like that made by the Qin. Your character gains 2 Enhancement to all rolls to understand alien or unfamiliar biotech, and for all rolls to create or reverse-engineer biotech devices. In addition, when crafting noetic biotech super-science inventions, your character receives two extra attempts to complete their required milestones successfully, and halves the time needed to complete each milestone. This Edge does not improve the character's ability to understand or create hardtech.

## PHOTOSYNTHETIC ◦

**Prerequisite:** None but required for Perezistas

Your character has undergone genetic modification that allows her to photosynthesize. As long as she exposes herself to at least eight hours of either sunlight or bright full-spectrum lighting, she only needs to eat one small meal a week, and can comfortably survive without any food for up to a month. Your character requires the normal amount of air and water.

**Disadvantages:** Your character's skin is green, causing her to suffer a level 2 Complication to all Social rolls relating to appearance from people who are uncomfortable with enhanced humans. In addition, to successfully photosynthesize, your character must expose most of her body to sunlight, and garments more concealing than shorts and a t-shirt do no permit her to gain full benefit from this Edge. This augmentation also gives the user complete immunity from sunburn and skin cancer, except when exposed to sunlight notably harsher than that found anywhere on Earth.

## TECHNOLOGICAL PERMISSIONS (◦ – ◦◦◦◦◦)

**Prerequisite:** Human Explorer, Diplomatic Liaison (human)

Through diplomatic or social connections, the character has earned the trust of the Qin and they have therefore given her permission to access their unique technology. The character possesses a number of pieces of Qin technology equal to her dots in this Edge. She does not need to purchase these items and their cost is not a factor. However, the Qin do not give outsiders access to any vehicle powered by gravito-magnetic propulsion. The character can change the items she has between sessions if she is able to gain access to a Qin world or embassy. Depending on the story the player wishes to tell, and Storyguide approval, this may be technology that the character owns, or that a Qin ally has loaned to her with possible consequences if it gets lost, stolen, or broken.

# NEW EDGES AND PATHS

The following new Paths are specifically for interstellar colonists, diplomats, and explorers.

## DIPLOMATIC LIAISON (SOCIETY)

Both human and Qin characters can select this Path. For members of both species, it reflects a diplomatic connection to either society. If taken by a human character, their home government assigned them to represent the government's interests with the Qin, whether that be militaristic, scientific, or related to interplanetary exploration. If taken by a Qin character, the same remains true as the character represents either the homeworld of Qinshui or a specific Qin House. In either case, the character possesses diplomatic immunity and regularly attends various cultural functions. The character's superiors also expect the character to support their interests. Formal diplomatic relations with the Listeners are sufficiently new that there are only a handful of human diplomatic liaisons on Skete, all of whom have also worked with the Qin.

**Path Concepts:** Clever ambassador, economic expert, human fascinated by Qin society, Qin fascinated by human society, subtle spy

**Possible Connections:** *Æon* Trinity personnel, Qin or human diplomats, Qin House leaders or human governmental officials, Qin infiltrators or human spies

**Skills:** Culture, Empathy, Integrity, Persuasion

**Edges:** [Alien] Partnership, Artistic Talent •, Calming Mein, Fame •, Iron Will •-••, Patron •-••, Photographic Memory • (•• for Qin), Skilled Liar, Wealth •-•••

### SPECIAL EDGE: CALMING MEIN (◎◎)

**Prerequisite:** Diplomatic Liaison

When caught up in the midst of a tense or heated situation, the character knows just what to say in order to cool tempers and soothe bruised egos. Once per scene she may shift the Attitude of a social encounter by one in a positive direction.

## EMBASSY PERSONNEL (ROLE)

The character either worked at the human embassy on Qinshui or Skete, the Qin embassy on Luna, or is otherwise someone who has worked closely with the Qin or the Listeners, and has cultivated a positive relationship with them. The character is well-received among their Qin or Listener allies and associates for their skills and resourceful nature.

**Path Concepts:** Alien anthropologist, biotech engineer, embassy personnel, scientific liaison

**Possible Connections:** Æon Trinity, Listener diplomats, Listener scientists, Qinshui homeworld, Qin diplomats, Qin scientists

**Skills:** Culture, Science, Survival, Technology

**Edges:** Adaptable, [Alien] Partnership, Big Hearted, Danger Sense, Dual Citizenship, Hardy, Technological Permissions •-•••, Patron •-••

## PEREZISTA (ORIGIN OR SOCIETY)

The character grew up in or joined the movement started by visionary and charismatic biologist Erin Perez, who advocates humans learning to live in harmony with the natural world and embracing both transhumanism and noetic biotechnology. Perezistas avoid using hardtech whenever possible, considering it to be inherently limited and destructive. Today, most Perezistas live in Brazil or on Mars or Far Nyumba. They are currently negotiating to build an enclave on Qinshui. In addition to all possessing green photosynthetic skin, most Perezistas are ardent transhumanists who are eager to adopt both Qin biotech enhancements and experimental genetic surgery to provide them with enhanced abilities.

**Path Concepts:** Amateur biohacker, biotech researcher, eager transhumanist, mystic, wilderness-loving environmentalist

**Possible Connections:** Biotech researchers, environmental activists, Qin, transhumanists

**Skills:** Culture, Science, Survival, Technology

**Edges:** Animal Ken •, Hardy, Increased Tolerance, Iron Will, Mars Adaptation, Photographic Memory, Photosynthetic

## REDISCOVERED WORLD (ORIGIN)

The character began her life on any of the rediscovered Nova Era lost colonies. She may still be a current resident of her home planet, or she may have hopped aboard a visiting spaceship and sought to visit Earth or some other world. Her childhood looked nothing like the average spacefarer or colonist, growing up on an alien world that was out of contact with Earth for many decades. Coming of age in this alien environment has left her well-accustomed to the strange and unusual.

**Path Concepts:** Descendent of original colonists, eccentric wanderer, intrepid zoologist, planetary guide

**Possible Connections:** Human spacefarers, Qin explorers, Æon Trinity personnel

**Skills:** Culture, Integrity, Science, Survival

**Edges:** [Alien] Partnership, Accustomed to the Strange, Adaptable, Animal Ken, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Hardy, Ms. Fix-It

### SPECIAL EDGE: ACCUSTOMED TO THE STRANGE (••)

The character has grown up in an environment filled with oddities, from alien flora and fauna to bizarre atmospheric events. Her idea of fearsome is somewhat skewed. When she would face an increased Difficulty, Complication, or Attitude adjustment due to an event that is bizarre, frightening, or out of the ordinary, she reduces it by 1 (to a minimum of 0).

CHAPTER FOUR

# THE QIN

Whether we are based on carbon or on silicon makes no fundamental difference; we should each be treated with appropriate respect.
—Arthur C. Clarke

# SOCIETY AND WORLDS

Qin society and technology have been relatively static for thousands of years. However, contact with humanity and exposure to the vast potential of human psychic powers has begun to change this. Some Qin are developing new technologies based on their understanding of human psychic powers, while others have started questioning the entire structure of Qin society and seek to give their people the same freedom of the stars that humanity now possesses.

For six years, Orgotek and Æon Trinity researchers and technicians worked closely with the Qin trapped in the solar system to build the Leviathan jump ships. During this same time, the teleporters vanished and marooned more than 10,000 humans on Qinshui. Both the Orgotek engineers and technicians and the embassy staff have had time to learn a great deal about the Qin, and the Qin working with them learned much about humanity. Now that humanity has returned to the stars, all these individuals can share information and facilitate greater interspecies understanding.

In addition, the creation of the Leviathan jump ships has given Qin the hope that they may be able to create and operate vessels capable of traveling faster than light without human aid. However, they are also aware that designing these starships will almost certainly require the assistance of human psions . In return for help with these efforts, and the chance to accompany humans on their own voyages of interstellar discovery, some Qin from House Tung Jen and House Hsiao Kuo are considering allowing humans to learn more about them and to visit the Qin colony worlds.

## QIN SOCIETY

Qin Houses are this species' equivalent of nations, but they organize themselves around activities and professions, rather than physical territory. Members of every Qin House live in every large Qin city, but their jobs in these cities are very different. The humans who have lived in Qinshui the longest liken the structure of these Houses to large human metacorporations – each one exists to perform a specific range of functions, they largely do not hold territory, and they work with the other Houses in a complex interrelated system of cooperation and rivalry. However, unlike many human metacorporations, Qin Houses inspire admiration and pride in their members, and they perform almost all the functions of government for their members, including schools for children, access to healthcare, and many other services, such as helping to settle

### LIVING ASTEROIDS AND COMET FORESTS

In the Qin's home star system, and in several other star systems, they have colonized thousands of asteroids and comets. These habitats use an enhanced version of the biotech city seeds that the Qin have been selling to humans. Some grow in caverns and open spaces deep inside large asteroids, transforming them into vast indoor gardens. However, most cover part or all the surface of the asteroid or comet, effectively creating a living roof that holds in air. Most of these tiny worlds are fitted with living gravity crystals, but some only use the asteroid or comet's minute natural gravity, since Qin long ago altered themselves so that they suffer no ill effects from life in low or zero gravity.

A few of the largest settled asteroids have populations of as many as a million Qin, but most are home to between several hundred and several tens of thousands of Qin. Loners, eccentrics, mystics, and individuals passionate about special projects best performed on small outposts in the vastness of space are the primary inhabitants of these settlements.

disputes. More than half of all Qin belong to the House of one of their parents.

All but the most selfish and sociopathic Qin understand that all the Houses are necessary for their society to function, and while rivalry between Houses can be useful, any form of serious conflict between Houses is not. In addition to cooperating on endeavors that fall within the purview of multiple Houses, all Qin Houses belong to the Council of Houses. This organization helps settle disputes between Houses, investigates crimes committed by members of one House against another, and deals with issues affecting the entire Qin species or Qinshui as a whole.

Their overall society reflects the Qin reliance on biological technology. They are inclined to use biological metaphors for societies and cultures, and have an almost instinctive understanding of interdependence and ecological systems. As a result, while hierarchy and inequality clearly exist in Qin society, one of the basic tenents of their culture is that all Qin should have access to the necessities of life, simply because to do otherwise is wasteful, inefficient, and destructive to the overall balance and harmony of their society.

Although Qin are almost as violent as humans on a personal level, violence that extends beyond purely local events like riots is rare and anything like warfare is almost unknown. However, when they began exploring the cosmos the Qin soon saw evidence of worlds destroyed by civil war or hostile alien invaders, and so they possess impressive and powerful weapons to defend their species. They have also begun manufacturing these weapons in larger numbers since they learned of the Aberrant threat.

While all Qin have access to necessities, murder, blackmail, and theft still exist. However, because some Qin have potent telepathic gifts, there are fewer sociopathic or otherwise deeply antisocial Qin, because teachers and psychic counselors identify and help children displaying such tendencies. Qin who commit crimes typically do so either because they believe (correctly or not) they can successfully get away with the crime and that it will benefit them, or for motives like rage, jealousy, envy, or greed that are all too familiar to humans. Another consequence of their telepathic gifts is there is an extensive body of law relating to telepathy. Mentally probing another Qin (or human) to learn their secrets is a crime, but is notably less serious than performing the same mental invasion and then sharing those secrets with others. Also, using Psychbending to manipulate, control, or possess others is an exceedingly serious crime equivalent to aggravated assault or murder.

## THE QIN HOUSES

Although politics cause Houses to rise, collapse, and combine over time, the Qin have possessed fifteen Houses since initial contact with humans. When they translated their names into human languages the Qin used names from the I Ching for their Houses in honor of the Ministry's use of the I Ching. In the Qin language, the popular names for Qin Houses mostly come from either popular Qin folk songs or the names of microbes. Each House has a true name that it attempts to prevent any outsiders from learning, and which Qin only learn when they formally join the House. In practice, any Qin who wishes to learn the actual name of another House can do so, but all Qin consider using a House's true name in anything except a few specific and highly formal circumstances to be exceptionally impolite.

Most humans who have spent time studying the Qin group the Houses according to their attitudes toward humanity. Qin Houses with positive feelings toward humanity are more likely to collaborate with humans. Positive does not necessarily mean friendly or warm. Members of these Houses may see humans as useful creatures whose talents and resources could help further Qin interests. Qin Houses with negative feelings toward humanity are more likely to distrust humans. Although they are unlikely to advocate destroying humanity, they view humans as a threat to Qin culture and livelihood. Houses with neutral feelings toward humanity tend to make judgements on a case-by-case basis. Individual members of any House may alternate between positive or negative stances, or genuinely not care about humans at all. Although every House contains Qin belonging to all three castes (Mind, Body, and Society, see **Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 351), each House considers one caste central to their existence.

## POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS HUMANITY

- **Xiao Guo (hexagram 62)** values invention and commerce. Xiao Guo was once two Houses, but merged long ago when members of each realized that commerce and invention strengthened one another. Money fuels experimentation,

which creates new products to sell. This merger led to Xiao Guo's famed practicality and efficiency. Xiao Guo prizes the Mind caste.

- **Hsein (hexagram 31)** values harmony. House Hsein prides itself on connecting disparate viewpoints and defining similarities among strangers. The greater the differences, the more interesting the challenge to find common ground. Hsein rarely leads decision-making in Qin politics, instead they rely on their alliances and reputation for producing strong mediators, peace officers, counselors, and social scientists. Human politics are a fun game or topic of conversation for this House. Hsein prizes the Society caste.

- **K'un (hexagram 2)** Values cultivation and growth. K'un focuses on tending to the present, on the small, daily tasks that build great works. Members often become frustrated with discussions of "what if?" and long-term effects; they ask instead, "what do we need to do *now*?" They want to understand what makes life work so they can act more efficiently. Members tend to become bureaucrats, laborers, architects, and other professionals that directly interact with activities of daily life, like food preparers or shop clerks. K'un prizes the Body caste.

- **Qián (hexagram 1)** values art and beauty. Artistry infuses everything Qián does. The House is well-known for an underwater fighting style where practitioners use bubbles and graceful movements to distract opponents and slide easily through the water. Sparring often draws spectators. Qián are also interested in finding new perspectives, because to them, perception enables art. Members often "tour" humanity by choosing one or a few people to follow, observe, and learn about. Qián prizes the Mind caste.

- **Tung Jen (hexagram 13)** values exploration. For Tung Jen, exploration is more than finding new frontiers and unknown places. Exploration is innovation, trying something just to see what new and interesting things come from it. Tung Jen is the House most closely allied with humanity. Humanity offers new paradigms, tools, and resources. Traditionally, Tung Jen is not a political House, though that has been shifting as they spend more time among humans. Most professional space travelers belong to this House. Tung Jen prizes the Body caste.

## NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS HUMANITY

- **Da Zhuang (hexagram 34)** values ambition and domination. Da Zhuang is a very competitive House that focuses on outperforming all others in whatever task they pursue. Da Zhuang also advocates aggressive terraforming and the creation of new Qin colony worlds and members are often leaders, managers, and terraformers. Humans are either distractions or rivals to defeat. Da Zhuang are one of the smallest Qin Houses. Da Zhuang prizes the Society caste.

- **Ken (hexagram 52)** values discipline. Self-mastery and continuous self-improvement are key activities within Ken. They attempt to hone everything to the point of maximum effectiveness. Members view those who fail to learn the limits and so destroy whatever they were doing with disdain. A sharp knife that is too brittle to use is no longer a knife worth using. Ken are appalled by most of humanity and the idea of "good enough." Members tend to become managers, personal assistants, project leaders, spies, and above all, engineers, Ken prizes the Mind caste.

- **K'uei (hexagram 38)** values defense. K'uei protects the Qin people and worlds from invaders and other attackers. They see the worst that humanity and more recently the Chromatics and Coalition have to offer: warmongers, invaders, and colonizers. Then there are the Aberrants who have laid waste to the universe. No one knows if they are the only or just the first overly powered monsters to emerge from humanity. As a result, K'uei is a deeply xenophobic House. They know that behind every open smile is a weapon waiting to fire. Many members of House K'uei are soldiers or bodyguards, but others are security experts, public health officials, and peace officers. K'uei prizes the Body caste.

- **Kui Mei (hexagram 54)** values community and views it as paramount. Every Qin belongs and every Qin contributes. Unity is strength. This goes beyond House and beyond caste, because ultimately, Qin are Qin. This warmth does not extend to those who betray the community or

who, like humans, never belonged in the first place. Members of this House believe all Qin should shun such individuals so that they cannot poison others. Members are often community organizers, counselors, mediators, peace officers, city planners, teachers, physicians, and local government officials. Kui Mei prizes the Society caste.

- **Ta Yu (hexagram 14)** values legend and glory. Ta Yu is the House of daredevils and performers. Members of Ta Yu focus on living epic lives and striving for more than anyone else would deem possible. They honor past legends and strive to become legends themselves. Qin die and knowledge evolves, but the stories endure. Ta Yu dislike humans for their disinterest in Qin lore and competitiveness. They view humans as young children trying to play a game they refuse to understand. Members often become performers, spies, orators, and athletes. Ta Yu prizes the Body caste.

## NEUTRAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS HUMANITY

- **Chia Jen (hexagram 37)** values family and heritage. This House focuses on documenting and preserving Qin culture, but especially Chia Jen culture. Children of this House grow up knowing the names and deeds of their ancestors and strive to live up to the past. Destroying historical artifacts or places or undermining known history are the easiest way to make an enemy of someone from this House. Many members are historians, scholars, storytellers, and teachers. Chia Jen prizes the Society caste.

- **Lu (hexagram 10)** values novelty. Restlessness drives the Lu, pushing them to seek out new experiences and wonders. Each Lu grows up internalizing the idea that *more* exists. Discovery, for the Lu, has little to do with answering questions or gaining renown; it is all about the experience. Lu seek out the new and weird wherever they are, garnering reputations as libertines, wanderers, and dangerous experimenters. Members often become performers, artists, eccentric researchers, and interstellar spacers. Lu prizes the Body caste.

- **Ming Yi (hexagram 36)** values intelligence and secrets. Knowledge is currency. Ming Yi trades in secrets and esoteric lore to increase its influence among the other Houses. The House is well-known for its massive archive of information. They document and cross-reference even seemingly insignificant details for future use. Ming Yi are willing to do whatever is necessary to uncover the hidden, decode the past, and trace the boundaries of Qin's collective knowledge. Many members are spies, historians, archivists, information technologists, or hackers. Ming Yi prizes the Mind caste.

- **Shi Ho (hexagram 21)** values justice and honor. Shi Ho was once two Houses who merged together over constant disagreement. This merger enshrined conflict at the core of the House. This conflict revolves around ethics and the tension between communal justice and personal honor. Shi Ho thrives on debate and gray areas. The professions most commonly associated with this House are judges, peace officers, mediators, and body guards. Shi Ho prizes the Society caste.

- **Zhong Fu (hexagram 61)** values knowledge. Asking questions and chasing answers are the bedrock of Zhong Fu. No fact is so well-established that they cannot test it again. Zhong Fu seek out big mysteries and then establish methods to tease out data and answers. Not all look outward when seeking new knowledge; Zhong Fu also honors inner exploration and the lifelong discipline of knowing oneself completely. Members are often academics, scientists, teachers, and philosophers. House Zhong Fu is increasingly important as continued contact with humanity causes a growing number of Qin to reconsider their belief in what is possible. Zhong Fu prizes the Mind caste.

## PSYCHIC POWERS AND SOCIETY

While most Qin cannot learn more than two dots in each telepathy Mode, all of them are born with one dot in Rapport and Mindshare. As a result, all Qin can communicate mentally with one another, and they can sense each other's emotions. While Qin possess both a written language and a version of "spoken" language that consists of a mixture of speech and complex pheromones, the ability of all Qin to communicate telepathically has drawn the species together and helps prevent the formation

of isolationist factions, exclusive groupings like nations, or multiple languages.

Also, while many Qin learn to shield their minds from intrusion, their ability to sense emotions and surface thoughts, and to allow others to sense their emotions and surface thoughts has permitted the Qin to develop a society where individuals can prove their trustworthiness to one another, and where secrecy is both difficult and highly valued. As a result, some human customs and works of human fiction make no sense to Qin. While Qin regularly shield themselves from casual mental intrusion, if they wish to demonstrate that they are honest and trustworthy, they can do so in a manner that only telepathically gifted humans can emulate. Also, their telepathy permits Qin to work together and share ideas in ways most humans can barely imagine.

Qin who work closely together typically join telepathic Networks, and while a few Qin only do this with a few individuals, most Qin consider these individuals selfish and paranoid. Frequently becoming part of small telepathic Networks is a normal part of Qin life and has been true since the earliest days of this species. Both the leadership of each House and the entire Council of Houses remain in overlapping telepathic Networks when formulating policy and dealing with dissent.

## QIN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

One puzzle humans have yet to understand is that while the Qin have been a spacefaring civilization for many thousands of years, their technology is no more than a century or two beyond human technology. Although their technology is significantly beyond anything humans can produce, it remains relatively comprehensible, and far from as impressive as most scientists expect that technology thousands of years ahead of humanity's would be like. The reason for this seeming paradox is that technological progress largely ended for the Qin thousands of years ago. While a few scientists and engineers attempt to make new discoveries, most settle for refining previous theories and increasing the reliability and ease of use of existing devices.

Most Qin believe that either the limited nature of Qin psychic powers or fundamental limitations of what science can learn are behind the static nature of Qin science and technology. However, the real reason is the Doyen fear progress by other species, and have been systematically thwarting most Qin efforts to develop new science and technology for thousands of years. However, Qin contact with humanity, and their observations of both the vast powers of the most skilled human psychics, and the limited information they have gained from studying information on Aberrants and their Quantum powers have already advanced Qin noetic biotechnology by a noticeable amount. Most Doyen dismiss the Qin as too static, weak, and limited to be a threat, since they have not needed to perform a significant intervention to limit Qin science in more than 1,500 years. In addition, almost all Doyen are now far more focused on the Aberrant threat and the potential danger that humanity poses to them. As a result, the Qin have a chance to advance their science and technology without interference, unless they make some sort of breakthrough that the Doyen notice. In this case, they could find themselves facing swift

### THE LIMITATIONS OF QIN BIOTECH

For all their vast prowess with biotech, Qin biotech has limits that human biotech lacks. In addition to being psionically limited, the Qin's limits also restrict the types of noetic biotech they can create. Without working with humans, Qin cannot create any noetic biotech more powerful than Rank 3 (before applying any modifiers that decrease its Rank, see the **Æon Æxpansion**, pp. 32-35 for more on creating noetic biotech. In addition, they cannot create any biotech that enhances or duplicates any psionics powers other than telepathy, biokinesis, clairsentience, or the Telekinesis Mode of psychokinesis. While humans suspect some of these limitations, the Qin do their best to maintain the illusion that their mastery of biotech is superior to humanity's in all ways. If their studies of human noetic biotech pay off, this illusion could also become reality.

However, Qin biotech does have some advantages over human biotech. They have versions of most human noetic biotech, and all these devices have a formatting cost that is one point lower than the equivalent human device, to a minimum formatting cost of 0.

and deadly retaliation by the more aggressive faction of the Doyen.

### Manufacturing and Biotech

Humanity thinks of Qin biotech as living creatures, which you can pay money for a reproduction license. Many Qin creations are like this, including both bioblimps and bioguards (p. XX). The Qin design these creatures, produce the first examples in their vast factory beasts, and then proceed to use them, while allowing them to eat, breed, and otherwise live their lives in the service of the Qin. However, some Qin living devices, including their enhancement polyps (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 289), city seeds (p. XX), and their famous biosuits are living creatures that are either so specialized or require such precise specifications that they cannot successfully reproduce. Factory beasts create such creatures, and they also assemble all the Qin technology that isn't alive. While all their vehicles and many of their tools are living beings, their tables, vases, carpets, and many similarly mundane items are non-living organic objects that specialized factory beasts extrude.

The factory beasts themselves are marvels of design, most are between the size of a large van (Size 2) and a small house (Size 3), but some are larger, and there are dozens of varieties, each specialized in creating different types of items, like vehicles, biosuits, small biotech augmentations, or simple non-living objects like furniture. Factory beasts are nearly immobile, but can waddle slowly for short distances if required. The Qin use specialized drones to collect food for them, and "program" factory beasts using a combination of samples of genetic material and a vast array of exceedingly specialized pheromones.

## Qin Interstellar Colonies

The Qin are an ancient species capable of interstellar travel. However, because their psionic powers are relatively weak, their efforts to visit and explore other star systems are limited to the speed of light. They have sent living probes to explore every star system within 100 light years of Qinshui, but have not explored further due to the time required and the limited benefit their explorations provided. These explorations found six worlds that are home to multicellular life, 20 worlds with primitive unicellular life, a badly damaged world that was home to an intelligent species that seems to have destroyed itself more than six million years ago, and a nearly lifeless world that also appears to have once been home to intelligence a million years ago. The Qin built colonies on all six worlds with complex life. One of these worlds became the Qin's primary research base, one exists to study an exotic and dangerous world, and four are large and thriving colonies that both study and make use of the native life. The six Qin colonies are Alcin-Plasi, Nemas, Palket, Swiin, Lilpatt, and Valat. The following descriptions do not include Nemas or Swiin, because they are both exceedingly similar to Qinshui. Nemas is 14 light years from Qinshui and Swiin is 21.

The badly damaged world they named Kort was once home to a vastly powerful psychic species that destroyed themselves in a genocidal war. Due to both the ruins' great age and the massive damage done to the world, which is just now recovering from a significant glaciation caused by the war, almost nothing beyond fragments and the psionically shattered remnants of Kort's large moon remain. Because of the residual psychic energy of this genocidal war, the Qin prefer to avoid this world. Blin is the other world that once contained intelligence. The Qin believe that someone, perhaps the inhabitants, used massive asteroid bombardment to render it nearly lifeless almost a million years ago. Today, Blin's oceans are home to only relatively simple life forms, microbes, and local versions of lichen and a few species of small.

### Learning About and Visiting the Qin Interstellar Colonies

So far, no human has visited any of the Qin interstellar colonies, and none have learned more than that the Qin have several such colonies, as well as some very general information that clears have gained from scanning various nearby star systems. Initially, the Qin were reluctant to allow a species they had only recently met to visit all their worlds. While the human embassy personnel were marooned on Qinshui, none of them were willing to further cut themselves off from their fellows by making a multiyear journey on a Qin starship. Now, the Qin are extremely eager to examine Leviathan jump ships in operation, and humans can now talk the Qin into allowing supervised visits to all these worlds, except Palket (see below), with relative ease. However, to obtain this permission, the crew

of the Leviathan must allow some of the more powerful Qin telepaths to telepathically contact both the Leviathan, and the clairsentient navigator. The Qin wish to study exactly how the Leviathan traverses space and the way in which the navigator works with the ship as part of their effort to create their own jump ships.

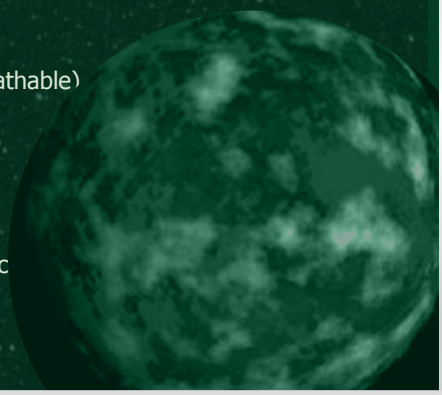
Without visiting these colonies, a telepath who combined her powers with a clear could learn general information about the Qin inhabiting various colony worlds, and any telepath who worked with a clear to scan Palket would notice that world's massmind. Embassy personnel have not done this for fear of offending the telepathic Qin. Currently the embassy staff warns clears and telepaths visiting Qinshui to respect Qin mental privacy, but will not specifically forbid attempts to psychically study any of the Qin interstellar colonies.

## ALCIN-PLASI

The approximate translation of the name of the planet Alcin-Plasi is "bake/freeze," which is an accurate description of this tidally locked world, where one hemisphere is bathed in eternal unmoving sunlight and the other is in endless frozen night. This cool, somewhat dry planet is home to exotic life that fascinates the Qin. While all the world's plant analogs are rooted in place, just like Earthly plants, almost a third of the animals living on both the land and in the oceans migrate long distances over the course of their lifetimes. These creatures' life cycle typically involves hatching from eggs laid in the world's cold half. Amphibious creatures bury their eggs near hydrothermal vents on the ocean floor, while land-bound creatures bury their eggs in the somewhat warmer land around geysers and other volcanic hotspots. These eggs hatch inside the corpses of their parents, with the surrounding ice or mud protecting them from predators. The young creatures emerge superbly adapted to life in extreme cold, and slowly swim, walk, or fly in the direction of the world's hot pole, stopping at geysers and other hotspots to feed on chemosynthetic and thermosynthetic organisms, or occasionally on one another. As they near the world's equator, these creatures gradually transform so they are more adapted for warmth, and grow rapidly in the verdant lands that stretch from just "north" of the equator to just "south" of the world's hot pole. After anywhere from several years to several decades, the creatures

## PLANETARY DATA: ALCIN-PLASI

**Founded:** Settled by Qin 13,800 years ago
**Discovery:** Soon to be visited by humans
**Distance from Earth:** 14,610 light years
**Distance from Qinshui:** 11 light years
**Star:** Berqua — M0
**Diameter:** 9,300 km
**Gravity:** 0.74 Earth
**Atmosphere:** Oxygen, nitrogen, and argon (breathable)
**Air Pressure:** 0.94 Earth
**Temperature:** –110° C to 90° C
**Percentage Ocean:** 59%
**Rotation Period:** Same as year
**Native Life:** Exotic flora and fauna, many genetic
**Qin Population:** 1.4 billion
**Human Population:** 0



mate and begin working their way "south," in the direction of the world's cold pole to lay their eggs and die, adapting to life in the frigid and eternally lightless cold as they travel.

### THE QIN COLONY

Alcin-Plasi is the most populous Qin colony, with a population that's almost 1/3 of that of Qinshui. Except for a relatively small number of researchers, miners, and mystics, the vast majority of the Qin live in the temperate twilight lands just north of the equator. They arrange their cities and other inhabited areas so there are large spaces between them where only native life exists, to allow avoid disrupting the lives of the many migrating creatures. Also, their living arcologies are considerably more closed and self-sufficient than those on Qinshui, because few Qin wish to venture outdoors on a world where the temperature difference has created constant winds that range between 25 and 70 kph. Due to their reluctance to go outside, Qin on this world are also somewhat less inclined to travel between arcologies, causing notably greater cultural differences between arcologies than on other Qin worlds.

Although they used native life as the basis for many of their bioengineered lifeforms, the inhabited regions of Alcin-Plasi closely resemble Qinshui. Because of its similarity to Qinshui, the Qin recently agreed to allow a Leviathan jump ship to visit this world. This expedition will leave quite shortly.

The Qin engineered an entire ecosystem of living machines and specially adapted biotech lifeforms using Alcin-Plasi's native life, and have also used the data they gathered from Alcin-Plasi to develop new biotech creatures for use elsewhere. Using information gathered from studying human biokinetics, a few Qin on Alcin-Plasi have begun experimenting with biotech augmentations that allow them to shift their own metabolism and bodies, so, with time, they can endure anything from –100° C to 60° C. Because of these efforts, the Qin have been able to explore Alcin-Plasi's cold hemisphere more thoroughly, and recently discovered ruins buried beneath the ice near the world's cold pole. While some Qin initially theorize that this world was once home to sentient life, the truth is that the Qin were not the first species to study this planet. An ancient alien civilization constructed several research bases on Alcin-Plasi roughly four million years ago, only one of which still survives.

## LILPATT

Lilpatt translates to "toxin," and it is the only life-bearing world near Qinshui which is not home to a Qin colony or research base. Instead, the Qin encased Lilpatt's large moon Ekta with a series of vast biodomes that now cover the entire surface, creating a colony

## ADVENTURES ON AND OFF LILPATT

Actual adventuring on Lilpatt primarily consists of non-stop battles with deadly local life forms, which can and will attack with claws, tentacles, acid jets, electrical generation, and biological lasers. Also, getting close to or making physical contact with one of the local life forms in order to scan it with Vitakinesis or Biokinesis is horrifyingly easy — surviving the encounter is the problem. Unless the players are eager for deadly non-stop combat, there's little reason to run a scenario down on Lilpatt. Bringing a living sample back, intentionally or not, can become the start of a potentially terrifying scenario, where the creature or creatures attempt to escape, find food, grow larger, and breed.

world entirely covered by a living roof three kilometers above its surface. The colony of Ekta closely resembles Qinshui and all life on it originally comes from Qinshui.

As befits its name, Lilpatt is deadly to all non-native life, and has the most unusual ecosystem ever discovered by either Qin or humans. Life on Lilpatt is exceptionally metamorphic and each organism seems to be a single vast cell with multiple nucleases, rather than being multicellular in any comprehensible fashion. When the Qin first encountered Lilpatt, all living probes they sent down to the planet swiftly died, because the planet's life contains compounds that set off lethal allergic reactions in all other known forms of life. However, that was merely the first of the world's dangers. The Qin sent down sampling biodrones that they carefully sealed against all contamination, and were able to obtain the first solid data on the world's biology, before local life forms ripped apart and devoured them.

The Qin observers learned that one of the strangest aspects of this bizarre and deadly ecosystem is that there appears to be nothing like separate species, the planet's inhabitants are all the same type of creature, just at different ages and stages of life. There are three such stages — all inhabitants of this planet start life as sessile, plant-like creatures that extract nutrients from the sun and soil, while using potent means like poisons or powerful electrical charges to keep predators from devouring them. In time, they become mobile creatures that are swift and equally deadly.

Both life stages possess the equivalent of two dots of the biokinesis Modes Adaption and Transmogrify,

## PLANETARY DATA: LILPATT

**Founded:** Moon settled by Qin 12,200 years ago
**Discovery:** Undiscovered and unvisited by humans
**Distance from Earth:** 14,591 light years
**Distance from Qinshui:** 16 light years
**Star:** Sek-kra — F8
**Diameter:** 14,100 km
**Gravity:** 1.3 Earth
**Atmosphere:** Oxygen, nitrogen, carbon dioxide (breathable with filter masks)
**Air Pressure:** 1.9 Earth
**Temperature:** –50° C to 65° C
**Percentage Ocean:** 68%
**Rotation Period:** 37 hours
**Native Life:** Exotic and deadly native life
**Qin Population:** 31 million on Lilpatt's moon Ekta
**Ekta Diameter:** 2,700 km
**Human Population:** 0

which they can use at will and without cost. The sessile creatures are relatively small, and to avoid predation keep most of their mass underground in a sea of spreading roots, while on the surface they can appear to be anything from spikey, somewhat mobile tree-like creatures, to lichen-like biofilms. Most mobile stages are approximately Size 0, have a Speed of either 2 or 3, and grow throughout their lives. The few mobiles that survive to grow sufficiently large and old reach the third stage of Lilpatt life, where they grow to Size 1 or Size 2. These creatures gain the ability to use four dots of both Adaption and Transmogrify, allowing them to exactly imitate the form of other creatures, to create exotic changes like biological lasers, and to survive in almost any conditions.

All creatures on Lilpatt are also immune to all telepathy Modes, and while it is unknown if any are sentient, most are quite clever, and the older creatures which can use four dots of Transmogrify are at least as intelligent as great apes, if also uninterested in any form of communication or cooperation.

Tests have shown that the largest and oldest creatures can endure vacuum, temperature extremes, and moderate levels of radiation. However, powerful lasers, high levels of radiation, and explosions can, with difficulty, kill them. Also, spending too long without food, water, or air sends them into a deep hibernation state where they are immobile and can only adapt to changing environmental conditions quite slowly, making them relatively easy to destroy.

Unfortunately, cutting off a portion of one of these creatures that is at least the size of a fist creates an independent creature, although smaller samples of a creature swiftly die. For the next scene any surviving separate creatures attempt to rejoin the body they were once part of, after that it becomes a fully independent entity. If it is relatively small, the new creature spends another scene seeking a nutrient rich environment and if it finds such an environment before dying, it becomes sessile until it can absorb sufficient nutrients to grow back to Size 0 — a process that takes between three weeks and six months, depending upon how available nutrients and energy are. If it cannot find nutrients within a scene, it dies. Unfortunately, living flesh, including Qin biosuits, counts as nutrients. Separate pieces that are Size 0 or larger become independent mobile creatures, and all mobile creatures can lay eggs that hatch into finger-sized sessile creatures within five days.

For reasons of safety, the Qin researchers refuse to land on the planet and have never brought any living tissue from one of these creatures to their base on Lilpatt's moon. Instead, they teleoperate biodrones, which attempt to retrieve individual creatures and experiment on them in heavily armored labs on Lilpatt's surface. Researchers must regularly replace these labs, because lab specimens consistently devour them. Also, the researchers make certain to land all biodrones and bases on the world using parachutes and rockets, and never use gravito-magnetic spacecraft within Lilpatt's atmosphere. They have no evidence that the older creatures could duplicate these drives, but fear what might happen if they could.

Humans who can gain the Qin's confidence can obtain permission to visit this star system relatively easily. However, the researchers forbid anyone from visiting the planet or removing any of the life forms. Researchers welcome visitors to use drones to observe the planet, and express great interest in hardtech drones, because they are far less vulnerable to attack by Lilpatt's life forms. Also, psions who demonstrate sufficiently impressive mastery of offensive and defensive Aptitudes, like Biokinesis, Psychokinesis, or Vitakinesis may gain approval to visit Lilpatt. However, doing so requires either landing and taking off in a specially designed rocket or via teleportation. Also, anyone returning from Lilpatt must visit an isolated quarantine station in orbit around Lilpatt before having contact with any other vehicles, bases, or other sentient beings.

The Qin forbid anyone else from visiting the world, to prevent Lilpatt's inhabitants from eating them. This world's deadliest inhabitants can damage or destroy even heavily armored military vehicles. However, a skilled biokinetic or vitakinetic who had the chance to visit Lilpatt and interact with the life there could greatly aid the researchers' understanding of this planet's strange and deadly life, and any psion who was either a biokinetic or a vitakinetic and who possesses an Auxiliary Mode in the other Aptitude could provide even more information. As a result, if characters with such abilities wish to visit Lilpatt, the Qin researchers will attempt to find a way for them to visit. However, these Qin could become overconfident, especially since characters with potent psionic powers offer the researchers a way to safely study the smaller creatures on the quarantine station.

## PALKET

Palket is the nearest colony world to Qin, and while starships rarely visit, it is in constant message laser contact with Qinshui. However, most

Qin leaders are determined not to tell humanity about this world without an excellent reason to do so. While many Qin regard it with reactions ranging from discomfort to distaste, it also represents the only major success this species has had in overcoming its psionic limitations. Palket is also the primary location for scientific and technical research among the Qin.

Most Qin have no desire to visit Palket because the inhabitants are all part of a single vast massmind. Thousands of years ago, researchers on this world developed biotech that allow all Qin to gain five dots in Mindshare, and four dots in both Rapport and Psychbending. This technology also allows Qin to combine their powers to temporarily gain five dots in either Rapport or Psychbending and six dots in Mindshare. However, all these increases in power have a cost. Using these bioapps greatly reduces users' individuality. Most of the planet's inhabitants reside in specialized biotech life support pods that connect occupants together in a vast psychic web where they all are in constant mental contact with one another. Users feel the emotions of everyone else in these pods, and obtain all the benefits of constantly using five dots in Mindshare. The occupants of these pods communicate, share memories, senses, and skills as effortlessly as they can twitch a tentacle. The life support pods also lower the cost of all telepathic powers to 0 Psi points, as long as they only use these powers on the occupants of other pods. The occupants of the pods interact with the physical world by mentally controlling biotech drones similar to, but more advanced than those recently developed by humans (see the ***Æon Æxpansion***, p. 24).

Approximately 6% of Palket's population are powerful psychics who spend some or most of their time outside the life support pods. These inhabitants either wear somewhat bulky biotech collars or occasionally humanoid biosuits or Qin personal transports (p. XX) with built-in biotech that connects them to the world's psychic web. However, while these individuals can use five dots of Mindshare with other members of the psychic web, these mobile devices provide no discount to Psi point cost. However, they can constantly use the first two dots of Mindshare (Network and Surface Skim) with all members of the psychic web.

These devices deprive the occupants of the life support pods of almost all their individuality. Although the Qin on Palket who spend most of their time outside these pods possess a limited degree of individuality, it is still notably less than ordinary humans or Qin. Because of its power, individuals who

## PLANETARY DATA: PALKET

**Founded:** Settled by Qin 13,100 years ago
**Discovery:** Undiscovered and unvisited by humans
**Distance from Earth:** 14,605 light years
**Distance from Qinshui:** 3.5 light years
**Star:** Taret — K8
**Diameter:** 24,200 km
**Gravity:** 1.86 Earth
**Atmosphere:** Oxygen, nitrogen, and argon (breathable)
**Air Pressure:** 2.8 Earth
**Temperature:** 0° C to 50° C
**Percentage Ocean:** 100%
**Rotation Period:** 53 hours
**Native Life:** Exotic flora and fauna, many genetically modified by the Qin
**Qin Population:** 92 million
**Human Population:** 0

are part of this psychic web can remain in contact with it as long as they are within six AU of Palket, which means all the planets within this small star system are accessible to users of this psychic web.

Almost no residents of Palket ever leave this star system, because doing so would involve leaving the mass-mind. Instead, they keep in contact with Qinshui using message lasers. Starships only stop at Palket to pick up particularly complex pieces of biotechnology produced there, or to carry some of the few scientists and engineers who are willing to give up their individuality in return for the chance to participate in cutting-edge research.

## CURRENT RESEARCH ON PALKET

With no access to more than one dot of clairsentience, and no teleportation powers, the Qin used to believe that only thoughts could travel faster than light. For almost 11,000 years, they have been attempting, without success, to create biotech that allows them to communicate telepathically over interstellar distances. Naturally, this research took place on Palket, but it stalled millennia ago. However, after receiving information from Qinshui about humans and their vast psychic powers, new vistas of research opened up. In 2119, the mass-mind made its first major breakthrough in 7,000 years, a device that permits the mass-mind to contact any mind that is within 50 light years that resides in a special psychic-enhancing life support pod. While this feat is trivially easy for a human telepath who combines her powers with a human clear, this is a revolutionary accomplishment for the Qin. Within a few months of this information reaching Qinshui by message laser, real-time telepathic contact was possible between Palket and Qinshui. Currently, messages from Palket are traveling to other Qin colony worlds via message laser, and when a Leviathan jump ship visits Alcin-Plasi in a month or two, the Qin who travel on this ship will carry a larval life support pod with them, so Alcin-Plasi will become the third Qin world to be accessible via telepathic contact.

## THE PLANET

The Qin created the colony on Palket because of its proximity to Qinshui, not because it is a particularly auspicious location for a colony. It orbits Taret, a small orange star that is the second closest star to Qinshui, and the closet life-bearing world. However,

Palket is far from inviting. It is a super-ocean world with high gravity, a dense oxygen atmosphere, and no land. The entire surface of Palket consists of an ocean almost 100 kilometers deep over a similar amount of pressure ice, with the only metal and rock on Palket located below that.

Some of the Qin on Palket live on vast floating islands made from foamed material mined from asteroids and the world's three moons. However, most of Palket's inhabitants, including almost all of those who live exclusively in life support pods dwell inside enormous sea creatures the Qin engineered for life on Palket. These creatures, called (in translation) "bubble-cities" float on the ocean's surface and look vaguely like translucent soap bubbles between two and five kilometers across. The vast air-filled bladder they use as a float contains a series of massive spaces filled with breathable atmosphere and biological lights. Although they look vaguely like gigantic jellyfish from the outside, the interior is much like the inside of any other Qin habitat. Because of the high gravity, the Qin fit all habitations and vehicles on Palket with living grav crystals.

Palket is also home to native life, most of which lives in the ocean, but some floats in the dense atmosphere using hydrogen gas bags. The largest of the ocean's inhabitants are immense ribbon-like creatures several hundred meters long, but none are even a fifth the size of the enormous bubble-cities. These living cities derive energy from a combination of living solar cells covering their floats, nutrients absorbed by an enormous array of tendrils 4.5 meters in diameter and up to 10 kilometers long, and local prey caught by smaller faster tendrils equipped with deadly stingers that capture and devour any potentially hostile non-sentient that comes too close. Each bubble-city is also a sentient being that is part of the world's psychic-web.

## HUMANS VISITING PALKET

While humans could use a Leviathan jump ship or simply a teleporter to visit Palket, unless they have an invitation, or Qin allies who possess both the desire and the status to give them access, the inhabitants of Palket immediately greet them with radio and telepathic messages telling them this star system is off limits and to leave immediately. Not only does remaining risk a diplomatic incident with the Qin, but also leaves all visiting humans vulnerable to psychic attack. Unless the humans use violence, the Palket mass-mind uses Psychbending to force them to leave and then forget everything about their visit except that the world was off-limits to uninvited visitors. Only proxy-Tier psions have any chance to defend against the mass-mind's power, all other humans are unable to resist, as is the mind of a Leviathan jump ship.

Gaining an invitation to Palket can be the result of the characters being particularly open at offering the Qin a chance to examine their Leviathan jump ship — something the Palket mass-mind would dearly love to do. Alternately, the Qin might invite a psion who was a noted inventor of biotech to visit Palket, especially if this psion seemed unusually good at understanding Qin biotech. However, while obtaining permission to visit the other colonies is relatively easy, visiting Palket requires the Qin the characters are interacting with to both trust them and believe they can be of value in advancing Qin science and technology.

Regardless of why the Qin permit them to visit Palket, this world's mass-mind openly greets and welcomes any humans who obtain an invitation. The mass-mind also warns all psions with any dots in telepathy to avoid using their powers to attempt to contact any of the local Qin present. Psychbending automatically fails when used against a member of the mass-mind, and Rapport produces a confusing tangle of emotions, as the psychic senses the emotions of every member of the mass-mind. However, while using Mindshare is not directly harmful, any roll to use it to contact any Qin connected to the mass-mind has a level 5 Complication. Failure to buy off this Complication results in the telepath temporarily becoming caught up in the mass-mind's vastness.

Unless the individual actively and deliberately wishes to remain within the mass-mind, the mass-mind painlessly ejects them 10-20 minutes later, after the telepath has gained a brief exposure to the mass-mind's strange and wondrous complexity. Possible reactions to this contact include distress at their temporary loss of individual identity, awe at the mass-mind's power and intellect, or simply confusion, as the telepath is unable to comprehend what she just experienced. Telepaths who successfully buy off the Complication can use any of the first three dots of Mindshare normally, but find the Qin's mind confusing, since even the Qin on Palket who do not live in the life support pods are very obviously not independent individuals. Also, if the

## PLANETARY DATA: VALAT

**Founded:** Settled by Qin 11,300 years ago
**Discovery:** Undiscovered and unvisited by humans
**Distance from Earth:** 14,583 light years
**Distance from Qinshui:** 58 light years
**Star:** Cipnan — M4
**Diameter:** 8,700 km
**Gravity:** 0.61 Earth
**Atmosphere:** Oxygen, nitrogen, and argon (breathable)
**Air Pressure:** 0.86 Earth
**Temperature:** –150° C to 55° C
**Percentage Ocean:** 70% of the world is covered by ice, and 40% of the habitable land area is ocean
**Rotation Period:** Same as year (13 days)
**Native Life:** Exotic flora and fauna, many genetically modified by the Qin
**Qin Population:** 200 million
**Human Population:** 0

telepath attempts to use Deep Scan (Mindshare ••••) or Override (Mindshare •••••), they understand that they have the choice of either ceasing the attempt or succeeding and automatically becoming part of the mass-mind for 10-20 minutes, with the same results as described above. Psions who visit Palket and who are willing to work with the mass-mind automatically gain 5 Enhancement to all rolls to design and craft noetic biotech, and can do so in one-third the normal time, but only if they can convince the mass-mind to assist them with the project.

## VALAT

Valat is the most distant Qin interstellar colony world and the colony with the most divergent culture. Because sending a message to Qinshui and then receiving an answer requires more than a century, communication with Valat largely consists of news and scientific and technical data, and starships from Qinshui visit infrequently.

From space, Valat is a particularly striking world. It looks like a shining white sphere of glacial ice with a large red and blue circle. The white is the glacial ice covering two-thirds of the planet, while the circle is a relatively small, but verdant and thriving habitable area with a small ocean. The reason for its strange climate is that like Alcin-Plasi, Valat is tidally locked. However, it is far colder, and only the portion of this world that is closest to its star is free from ice. Vast glaciers several kilometers high surround the habitable area on all sides. When the Qin initially settled Valat, they considered using huge orbital mirrors to raise the temperature and permit more of the world to be habitable, but their studies revealed that doing so would seriously disrupt and harm the local biosphere, and would likely render the world lifeless. Instead, the colonists decided to live on this unusual world.

Like other Qin, the inhabitants organize themselves into Houses, but on Valat, each House holds physical territory, and Qin that possess the potential for more impressive psychic powers control all of these Houses. Due to genetic quirks in the original colonists, only 10% of the Qin on Valat can learn more than two dots in any telepathy Mode or raise their Psi above 2. Early testing insures that each House raises Qin with greater psychic potential as members of Valat's ruling class, and oversee each of the world's seven Houses. These Qin lead lives of power and luxury, while the remainder of the population exist far more modestly. No Qin on Valat live in poverty, and their rulers rarely oppress or abuse them, but Valat's culture and laws require them to defer to the ruling class, and they lack all voice in House politics.

Valat's culture is also relatively violent, with the psychic "nobility" regularly engaging in both intrigue and occasional violent border skirmishes with other Houses. In addition, within each House, duels using both psychic powers and special biosuits are relatively common, and assassinations are far more frequent than on Qinshui. Most Qin regard the inhabitants of Valat as both bigoted and violent, and only the most violent and eccentric Qin immigrate to this world. Because of its distance from Qinshui, no one on Valat knows that humanity contacted the Qin 14 years ago.

Like the other Qin colonies, the Qin have heavily engineered most local life forms. However, the appearance of these biotech creatures is quite different from those on Qinshui and the other colony worlds, since the native life on this world is oddly Earthlike. The plants are reddish black due to the large red sun in the sky, and the dominant animals all possess internal skeletons, four legs, and two eyes on a head that also contains their nose and mouth. The dominant life forms are warm-blooded creatures surprisingly similar to mammals, except that they possess fine scales, and there are creatures like birds, whose scales evolved into feathers. The Qin have modified these animals to be vehicles, beasts of burden, living drones, and all the similar uses. Genetic samples shipped from Valat to Qinshui long ago formed the basis for both the diplomat and warrior biosuits, and once the inhabitants of Valat are in contact with Earth, they could potentially sell humanity biotech creations that appear far less alien than most Qin biotech.

# QIN CHARACTER CREATION

Creating a Qin character follows the same steps as human characters. The alien nature of the Qin extends beyond the template applied in Step Five, however. Players should read all six steps before beginning with Step One.

## STEP ONE: CONCEPT

At the concept stage, in addition to determining what type of character a player wants to play, the player must also determine which Tier the character is, as well as the character's House and caste. Houses are like non-geographically defined nations, and each House has its own values and mores, see p. XX for descriptions of the 15 Qin Houses. A caste is a character's place within society. The Qin do not consider any of the three castes superior or inferior to the others. However, every House prizes one caste somewhat more than the other two. Houses with similar caste preferences are more likely to collaborate than those with different preferences.

### TIER

Qin characters can be either mundane or psion Tier. Psion Tier Qin have greater Psi powers than mundane Tier Qin and represent 20% of the Qin population. Unless the players and the Storyguide want a campaign where everyone plays mundane Tier characters, Qin characters should normally be psion Tier, just like ordinary psions and psiads. Currently, no Qin can attain proxy Tier.

### QIN NAMES

When Qin are born, they receive their familial name, which is a color the parents choose for the newborn. Families choose these names for different reasons. Some families have a signature color and all names describe a shade of that color. Others choose names with meaningful connections to family history or symbolic ties to their hopes for the newborn's future. For example, blue and green names were popular among Qin interested in establishing ties with Earth after initial contact.

#### QIN NAME EXAMPLES

The following are possible names for Qin characters:

- Wisteria Stonesmasher Body Kui Mei
- Fern Green Microbe Shepherd Mind Ming Yi
- Feldgrau Sprinting Body Zhong Fu
- Malachite Songmender Society Hsein
- Steel Blue Hopekiller Society Shi Ho

Among humans, these characters might go by the following or similar nicknames:

- Wisteria or Smasher
- Fern or Shep
- Feldgrau or Sprint
- Mal or Song
- Steel or Hope

## HOUSE AND CASTE

A character's caste and the preferred caste of the character's House do not need to be the same. Each House instills certain values that affect how the Qin views the world but does not dictate what each Qin must become or how each Qin acts. All Houses contain numbers of all three castes, although roughly half of each House's members belong to the preferred caste. Members of a House's preferred caste usually have an easier time advancing into positions of authority. In addition, their House may influence how the character carries out an occupation. Warriors from Shi Ho, Ta Yu, and K'un will all have very different approaches to engaging with enemies.

When Qin become adults, they receive three additional names: House, personal, and caste. Their House name is the name of the House the Qin chooses to join. Almost two-thirds of all Qin join the House they are born into, but some do not. However, once chosen, few Qin choose to leave that House and join another. Personal names are descriptive. This descriptive name may refer to something the new adult has already become known for or something they hope to be. Caste is the role a Qin wishes to play in society and what sorts of profession they wish to pursue. Choosing a caste is a personal choice based on the Qin's aptitudes and interests.

Once a Qin has announced their full name at their adulthood ceremony, it does not change unless they change Houses or do something of sufficient renown or notoriety that it demands their personal name change. Such changes are exceedingly rare.

Among humans, most Qin use either their familial or personal name, or a shortened version of them. Other Qin prefer to adopt human names instead of shortening their own names or revealing attributes about themselves they wish to hide. When Qin use human names, they often choose ones from Chinese history because of their history of contact with China. They often choose historical names related to how they hope humans will perceive them. For example, someone wishing to portray themselves as an accomplished artist might take the name Qi Baishi, in honor of the renowned artist, while someone who wishes to become an advocate for peace might go by Wang Zhaojun, after the famous concubine who helped cement peace between the Han Chinese and the Xiongnu tribes.

**Familial Names:** Familial names are always colors, but the colors need not belong to the visual spectrum. Possible names include Absolute Zero, Azure, Beige, Celadon, Ecru, Far Ultraviolet, Fuchsia, Heliotrope, Imperial Red, Light Yellow, Maize, Olive, Onyx, Peach, Rose Ebony, Seagreen, Sepia, and Silver.

**Personal Names:** Personal names have more variety but tend to focus on something the Qin does or is and often end with -er or -ing. These names can be metaphorical and are often aspirational. Possible names include Blossoming, Bone Breaker, Bridgemaker, Ever Flying, Laughing, Light Keeper, Mapmaker, Sneaking, Starfinder, Storycrafter, and Watchful Guardian.

Qin may not share their full names with humans, preferring to go by "Hope Shi Ho" than "Steel Blue Hopekiller 'Hope' Society Shi Ho." This can mislead humans who make assumptions about what the Qin's full personal name may be.

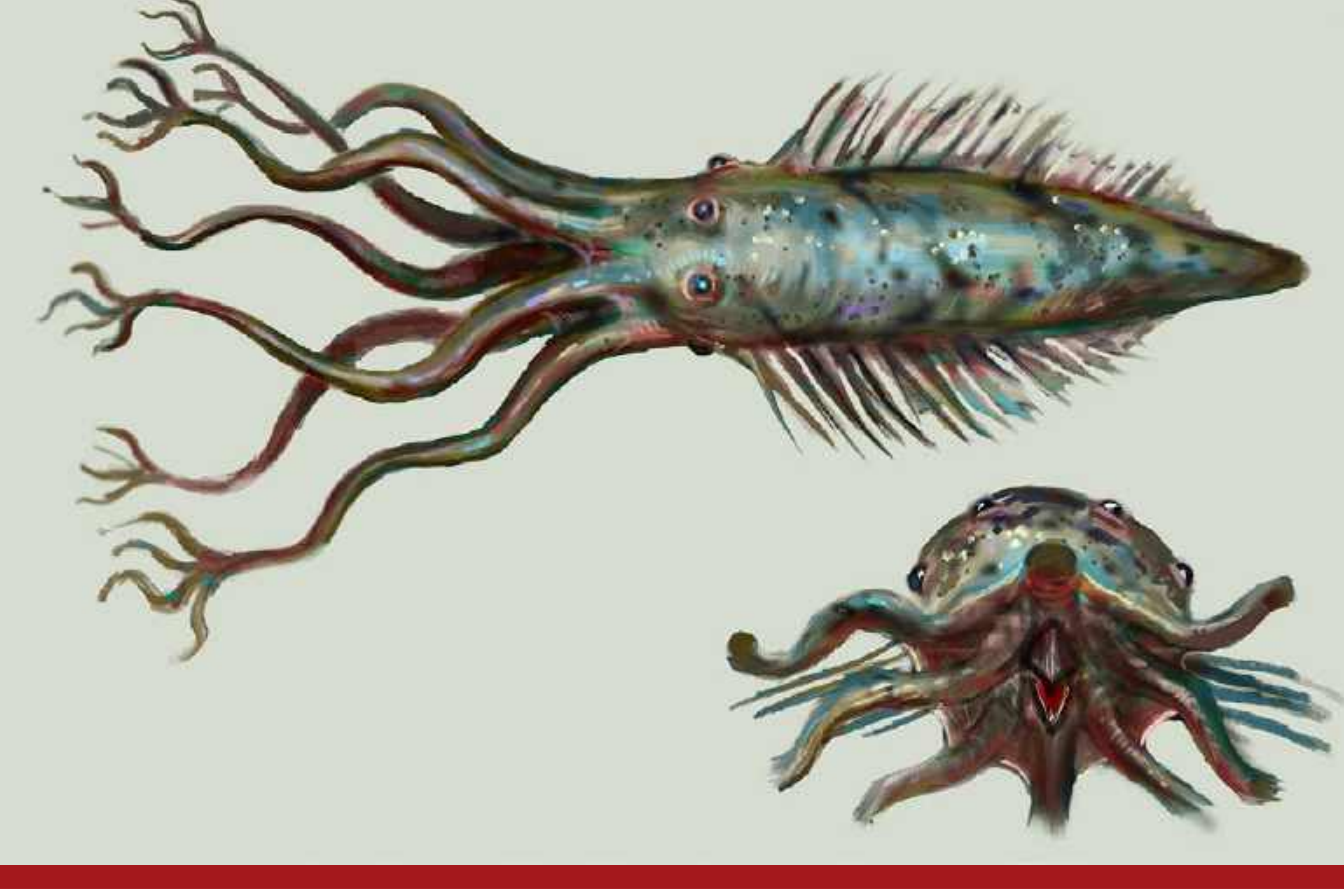
### CASTE AND HOUSE

The Qin have three castes: Body, Mind, and Society. The caste is the realm in which a Qin's interests and abilities lie and Qin freely choose their caste. Adult Qin choose an occupation within their caste. Descriptions of the 15 Qin Houses are in the previous section (p. XX), and all Qin characters belong to one of these Houses, which they choose upon becoming adults. Qin can change their House, but doing so is relatively rare and always considered a major life change.

### STEP TWO: PATHS

During Step Two of character generation, the player chooses Origin, Role, and Society Paths for her character. Most Qin characters have a Caste Path instead of a Role Path. Some Qin with exceptionally focused interests can choose appropriate human Role Paths, like Military, Spacer, or Space Military. However, the majority follow their Caste Path.

Qin characters can also choose any of the Origin or Role Paths from the **Trinity Continuum Corebook** (pp. 41-44). Qin infiltrators can take any Society Path open to human neutrals, including membership in one of the psi orders or the *Æon Trinity*. In addition, the Organizational Liaison Path (p. XX) is an excellent choice for Qin who work as



diplomats to humanity. See below for descriptions of the three Caste Paths, and several other new Paths specifically for Qin characters.

## STEP THREE: SKILLS, SKILL TRICKS, AND SPECIALTIES

Players complete this step as explained in the **Trinity Continuum Corebook** (p. 37).

## STEP FOUR: ATTRIBUTES

When ranking the three Arenas to determine Attribute distribution, the highest ranked Arena must correspond with the character's caste. Those within the Body caste must rank Physical highest, Mind must rank Mental highest, and Society must rank Social highest. Players choose their characters' Favored Approach normally. Qin can never possess more than five dots in any Attribute.

### QIN PHYSIQUE

You're a very small, weak alien compared to humans.

**Effects:** You struggle with all actions requiring Might. When a dice pool includes Might, you suffer a Complication that inflicts –3 to your roll.

**Resolution:** You wear a Qin biosuit that negates this Condition.

## STEP FIVE: APPLY QIN TEMPLATE

The first step in applying this template is understanding the differences between humans and Qin. Each Qin character is Size Scale 0 (**Trinity Continuum: Æon,** p. 331). Out of a biosuit, Qin may move 6 m/round on land and 12 m/round while swimming. Qin can breathe both air and water. Each Qin regularly switch sexes, allowing them to both impregnate and become pregnant — although not at the same time. Qin do not possess an innate sense of taste, experiencing it only when their biosuit consumes food.

Unlike humans, Qin only have two Condition levels: Bruised and Maimed. Qin characters must also take following permanent Condition: Qin Physique.

All Qin are naturally telepathic. Qin start at Psi 2 with four dots in telepathy. Of these four dots, characters must possess at least one dot in both Rapport and Mindshare. The other two dots may go into any of the three telepathy Modes.

## QIN PSI TRAIT

| PSI | DESCRIPTION | TELEPATHY MODES MAXIMUM | ATTUNEMENT RANGE | TARGET NUMBER | PSI POINTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • | Noetically Limited Qin * | 0 | Close | 8 | 1 |
| • • | Average Qin | 2 or 4 ** | Short | 8 | 5 |
| • • • | Competent Qin | 4 | Short | 8 | 7 |
| • • • • | Powerful Qin | 4 | Medium | 8 | 10 |

* A Qin reduced to Psi 1 is weakened in what she can accomplish but doesn't lose access to her powers. She still has access to her Mode dots, but her Attunement range drops to Close. She retains any Psi points in her Psi pool as long as she doesn't use it, but can't regain Psi points beyond a pool of 1 in her weakened condition.

** Depending upon their Tier.

Mundane Tier Qin cannot increase their Psi above two dots and can only learn two dots in each telepathy Mode.

Psion Tier Qin can increase their Psi trait to four dots and can learn up to four dots in each telepathy Mode. These Qin can also learn non-telepathy Auxiliary Modes. However, they only have access to a few Auxiliary Modes. The character may take up to two dots in any Biokinesis Mode, one dot in any Clairsentience Mode, or one dot in the Psychokinesis Mode Telekinesis. Other than the limitations on which Auxiliary Modes they can learn, Qin treat their Auxiliary just like human psions (**Trinity Continuum: Æon,** p. 209). See the table below for details about their Psi trait. Qin can combine their telepathy with one another and with humans, just like psions can do with one another (**Trinity Continuum: Æon,** pp. 207-208).

Qin characters of either Tier cannot use five dots in any Telepathic Mode, even when attempting to activate a power in excess of their Mode dots.

## QIN EXPERIENCE COSTS

| TRAIT | CHANGE | COST |
|---|---|---|
| Attribute | Add one dot to a single Attribute | 10 Experience |
| Biosuit (additional) | Obtain an additional diplomat biosuit | 15 Experience |
| Biosuit (additional) | Obtain an additional warrior biosuit | 25 Experience |
| Biosuit (additional) | Obtain an additional infiltration biosuit | 30 Experience |
| Biosuit Upgrade | Add 1 point of Upgrades to the character's biosuit | 3 Experience |
| Edge | Add one dot in a new or existing Edge | 3 Experience |
| Edge | Add one dot in a new or existing Path Edge | 2 Experience |
| Enhanced Edge | Gain a new Enhanced Edge | 6 Experience |
| Favored Approach | Change a character's Favored Approach | 15 Experience |
| Psi Trait | Add one dot to the character's Psi Trait (up to Psi 4) | 15 Experience |
| Mode Dot | Add one dot in a telepathy Mode (one to four dots) | 8 Experience |
| Auxiliary Mode | Add one dot in an Auxiliary Mode | 10 Experience |
| Skill | Add one dot in a new or existing Skill | 5 Experience |
| Skill Trick | Add a Skill Trick to a Skill | 3 Experience |
| Specialty | Add a Specialty to a Skill | 3 Experience |
| Path | Add one dot in a new or existing Path (maximum five Paths) | 18 Experience |

In addition, each Qin automatically gains the following Edges at no cost: Ambidextrous, Keen Sense (smell), Low Gravity Adaptation •, and Photographic Memory • (trained memory), as well as the equivalent of the vision enhancement augmentation (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 289).

Lastly, each Qin character starts play with a Qin diplomat biosuit (p. XX).

## STEP SIX: FINISHING TOUCHES

Gain bonus traits (**Trinity Continuum Corebook**, p. 38), and calculate Health and Defense rating. A player of a Qin character may also choose any of the following:

- Add four points of upgrades to the diplomat biosuit
- Change suit type to warrior and add one point of upgrades
- Change suit type to infiltration

## CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

While Qin characters mostly advance the same as other characters, some differences exist. Use the Character Advancement table (**Trinity Continuum Corebook**, p. 39), with the following additions.

# QIN EDGES

Qin can learn any Edges available to psions, except that they cannot learn the Superior Trait Edge (**Trinity Continuum Corebook,** p. 66), and the only Augmentation Edge they can learn is Increased Tolerance (**Trinity Continuum: Æon,** p. 127). They can learn all Psionic Edges (**Trinity Continuum: Æon,** p. 128). The following Edge is only available to Qin characters.

### NETWORK NODE [••]

**Prerequisite:** Qin only, must possess at least one dot in Mindshare

Your character excels at compartmentalizing its telepathic powers and can be part of several Networks at once. Each Network after the first costs the character 1 Psi point; the number of individuals in one Network has no impact on how many can be within others. The character can choose to keep information exchange separated for each Network or can meld multiple Networks as if they were one by taking an ordinary action. Individuals within separate Networks joined this way need not be within range of each other, if they're within range of the character with this Edge. The character can separate Networks again with another ordinary action. The Qin rapidly establish global communion with vast sections of the population using this Edge.

# QIN PATHS

The following new Paths are only available to Qin characters.

## BIOTECHNICIAN [QIN ROLE]

**Prerequisite:** Qin character

Trained at any of the best schools on Qinshui, the character has successfully made a career of engineering and creating the iconic Qin biotechnology. They may have contributed designs to the famous Leviathan ships or had one of their plans implemented as a bioVARG. Whether a lead scientist or a contributor on dozens of projects, the character is well-versed in the science of biotech.

**Path Concepts:** Biotech expert, psionic biotech aficionado, respected scientist, Leviathan ship's engineer

**Possible Connections:** Qinshui homeworld scientists, Leviathan ship creators, Orgotek, Qin military

**Skills:** Enigmas, Medicine, Science, Technology

**Edges:** Library •, Lightning Calculator, Increased Tolerance, Ms. Fix-It, Network Node, Patron •, Speed Reading, Wealth •-•••

## Body Caste (Qin Role)

**Prerequisite:** Qin character

The character grew up working with their tentacles and biosuit appendages. The strain of pushing too far, of testing how far they could go thrilled them. The high speeds of interstellar travel, long aches after a good fight, the idea of standing up for others, and putting their body on the line filled their dreams.

**Path Concepts:** Diplomatic bodyguard, interstellar explorer, peace officer, Qin military squad leader

**Possible Connections:** The peace keeper force, client, superior officer, ship captain, fellow soldiers

**Skills:** Aim, Athletics, Pilot, Survival

**Edges:** Adrenaline Spike, Always Prepared, Breath Control, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Hair-Trigger Reflexes, Iron Will, Network Node, Small Unit Tactics, Weak Spots

## Colonist (Qin Origin)

**Prerequisite:** Qin character

The character is a brave volunteer willing to board a Qin starship and travel into the reaches of space in suspended animation or board a Leviathan ship, risking their own life to discover and inhabit new worlds. Whether brand new to the planet, or a resident of many years, the character began their life on Qinshui but now resides elsewhere. They may be anything from a scientist to a farmer, an ex-soldier, or simply a brave civilian. Either way, they have some experience with their life on the homeworld, and some from another world. Anyone who chooses the life of a colonist is curious, brave, and adaptable.

**Path Concepts:** Bold civilian explorer, curious scientist, ex-soldier looking to settle down, veteran spacefarer

**Possible Connections:** Qin scientists, Qin military, other Qin colonists, Qin starship crew

**Skills:** Aim, Empathy, Survival, Technology

**Edges:** Adaptable, Animal Ken, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Hardy, Network Node, Pioneer Spirit (**Trinity Continuum: Æon,** p. 130)

## Infiltrator (Qin Role)

**Prerequisite:** Qin character with an infiltration biosuit

The character is living a lie. They pretend to be human, and may have even joined one of the psi orders or the Æon Trinity as a neutral. They live amidst humans and almost all their interactions are with them, but they know that they are not human and that their goal is to provide their House valuable information, and perhaps help strengthen ties between humanity and the Qin. Typically, these characters possess a human Society Path.

**Path Concepts:** Æon Trinity researcher, freelance spy, journalist, psi order bureaucrat

**Possible Connections:** House leaders, other Qin infiltrators, Qin diplomats, various humans who believe they are human

**Skills:** Culture, Enigmas, Larceny, Technology

**Edges:** Alternate Identity, Always Prepared, Covert, Danger Sense, Iron Will, Skilled Liar, Speed Reading, Wealth •-••

## Mind Caste (Qin Role)

**Prerequisite:** Qin character

Ever since childhood, the character has been fascinated by the world around them and through observation, investigation, or art, strives to understand it. The universe is full of questions and surprises. They enjoy stretching their mind with new ideas, pondering contradictions, and ferreting out secrets.

**Path Concepts:** Corporate spy, epidemiologist, lead bioengineer, microbial artist

**Possible Connections:** Artistic community, university, project director, rival academic, your spy handler

**Skills:** Enigmas, Humanities, Science, Technology

**Edges:** Always Prepared, Artistic Talent, Covert, Detached, Photographic Memory ••, Speed Reading, Ms. Fix-It, Network Node

## Organizational Liaison (Qin Society)

**Prerequisite:** Qin character in a diplomat or warrior biosuit

The character works with a specific human organization, usually one of the psi orders or the Æon Trinity. They aren't technically a member of this organization, but they work with it closely and their loyalties may become blurred, especially since they spend almost all their time around humans.

**Path Concepts:** Aberrant hunter, ecological restorationist, Leviathan jump ship engineer, research physician or scientist

**Possible Connections:** Human members of the organization, members of allied organizations, other Qin liaisons, Qin diplomats

**Skills:** Culture, Empathy, Science, Technology

**Edges:** Big Hearted, Danger Sense, Increased Tolerance, Iron Will, Network Node, Photographic Memory ••-•••, Wealth •-•••

## SOCIETY CASTE (QIN ROLE)

**Prerequisite:** Qin character

The character always enjoyed working with others. To them, every individual is a microcosm of the cosmos, capable of both the incredible and the horrendous. The sheer possibility fills them with ideas and excitement. Even when relationships are fraught, they enjoy untangling arguments and restoring friendships.

**Path Concepts:** Crisis mediator, diplomat to Earth, House representative, underwater dancer

**Possible Connections:** Theatre troupe, diplomatic corps, former students, suppliers, market regulators

**Skills:** Command, Empathy, Integrity, Persuasion

**Edges:** Animal Ken, Artistic Talent, Big-Hearted, Direction Sense, Fame •, Iron Will, Network Node, Skilled Liar

## VALAT NOBLE (QIN SOCIETY)

**Prerequisite:** Psion Tier Qin character

The character became one of the "nobles" of the Qin Houses on Valat due to their impressive psionic power. They possess both power and luxury on their homeworld, though may not find the same treatment elsewhere. Any member of the Valat nobility must be a psion Tier character and the more powerful a psion the character is, the greater station and power they possess. The character has likely clashed with other members of Valat Houses for power, fighting in psychic skirmishes over territory. Qin from other worlds may regard the character as boorish or violent.

**Path Concepts:** Naïve noble with much to learn, noble house champion, psionic skirmisher, renowned duelist

**Path Connections:** Qin diplomats, noble Houses of Valat, noble Qin champions

**Skills:** Close Combat, Command, Culture, Technology

**Edges:** Adrenaline Spike, Fame •, Iron Will, Inner Reserve (**Trinity Continuum: *Æon***, p. 130), Patron •-••, Wealth

# QIN BIOSUITS

The Qin have domesticated, bred, and trained other lifeforms since early in their evolution. Some Qin researchers believe that their control over other life forms is what differentiated the Qin from other life, providing opportunities to enhance and hone their intelligence, and — eventually — gain dominance over other species on Qinshui.

As the Qin grew in intelligence, their relationships with the creatures they domesticated grew increasingly complex. They domesticated the larger creatures and, through careful breeding and, later, genetic manipulation, shaped those creatures into unrecognizable and ever more useful forms. Each new world the Qin discovered led to new lifeforms to modify. They eventually transformed some of these creatures into living vehicles and then into creatures they could control as well as their own bodies, making them into powerful symbionts. When not around humans, Qin typically use non-humanoid symbionts. The Qin personal transport (p. XX) is one of their more common symbionts.

Within their symbionts, the Qin have greater reach, strength, stature, and durability. When they encountered humanity, the Qin swiftly created symbionts that looked humanoid, to permit them to meet humans as equals. These were the first biosuits. The diplomat and warrior biosuits are animal-based, while the infiltration biosuits are vegetation-based. All three include genetic material from Qin interstellar colonies.

Biosuits and other symbionts are somewhat different from most Qin creations, since factory beasts (p. XX) construct them, and they are not capable of independent reproduction. Also, without an occupant they are nearly mindless creatures, little more intelligent than Earthly fish. They can take care of their basic needs, but are entirely unaggressive and incapable of following any but the simplest commands.

If a Qin needs to control a biosuit remotely, they install one of the semi-intelligent Bànlu (p. XX) in it. Once inside a biosuit or other symbiont, Qin treat this organism as a direct extension of its body, using its senses and moving its body as easily as they do their own. However, all symbionts contain sufficient instincts that new users can walk and run normally within a few hours, rather than having to learn to walk as a biped.

## COMMON FEATURES

The Qin use three types of biosuit around humans: diplomat, warrior, and infiltration. Biosuits protect Qin within them from external elements and forces. Each biosuit also has its own Injury Conditions. Should a biosuit be Taken Out, the Qin inside survives and the biosuit's armor continues to protect them until they leave the body. Because biosuits are living creatures, they heal naturally and both medicine and vitakinesis can heal them.

Since the biosuits are symbionts with their own nutritional and rest needs, Qin using a biosuit must ensure to feed the biosuit regularly. Each type of biosuit has different dietary needs, and all biosuits require at least four hours of rest every 24 hours of use. The Qin need not exit the biosuit for the rest period. Instead, most Qin sync their sleep cycle with their biosuit.

### BIOSUITS, TOLERANCE, AND FORMATTING

While Qin do not need to format most of their biotech, they can format some of the most advanced biotech and they must format a few pieces, including biosuits. To use a biosuit or another symbiont, Qin must format it. This process is relatively simple, the Qin merely sheds a few of its cells into the symbiont's mouth and spends 1 Psi point to make a connection to the biosuit. One minute later, the biosuit is formatted. Most formattable Qin devices have lower Tolerance requirements than most human-made biotech, and biosuits are no exception. Biosuits all have a Tolerance equal to • + • for every four points of upgrades, rounded down.

All biosuits can secrete a gel substance that coats their face and body, protecting it from the vacuum of space, extreme temperatures, and related environmental dangers. Qin also use a form of this gel as a gripping substance for climbing. This substance duplicates the function of human-made biotech grippers (**Trinity Continuum:** Æon, p. 294). Every biosuit also has the feature "Enhanced Physique" which negates the Qin Physique Condition.

All Qin characters begin with a basic diplomat biosuit, though they may choose to swap to a warrior or infiltration suit or add upgrades to their basic suit. Characters may obtain a new biosuit through story developments or by spending Experience.

## DIPLOMAT AND WARRIOR BIOSUITS

As far as most humans know, the Qin have two types of biosuits: diplomat and warrior. Both of which are bipedal humanoids. Both the diplomat and the warrior biosuits are warm-blooded creatures with internal skeletons. They were based on samples originally taken from the Qin colony of Valat. The Qin chose these species for their biosuits because the creatures resembled humans more than other species the Qin have used.

Qin enter the diplomat or warrior biosuit through an external pocket that lays seamlessly against the body, hidden beneath the suit's skin or scales, respectively. This pocket, thanks to genetic manipulation, connects to an internal fluid-filled cavity, protected by cartilage and fat. The Qin draw nutrition from the fluid surrounding them.

Neither biosuit resembles their ancestral form. The two-meter-tall diplomat biosuit was originally a large, semi-aquatic creature. The only echoes of this creature remain in the biosuit's sinuous grace. The 2.2-meter-tall warrior biosuit was once a large armored predator. The biosuit retains its ancestor's keratin scale plating, but little else.

Diplomat biosuits' skin and warrior biosuits' scales contain chromatophores that can shift color along the entire spectrum. Qin tend to tint their biosuits to match their familial names as a way of personalizing the biosuit or connecting with their family. Unsurprisingly, most humans, with their typical self-centeredness, believe Qin do this to help humans tells them apart. The chromatophores can also replicate patterns, affording the Qin some basic camouflage when in their biosuits.

### BASIC DIPLOMAT BIOSUIT

The basic diplomat is tall, elegant, and can shift colors at will. The basic suit does not include any weaponry.

The diplomat biosuit possesses the following features:

- Armor with the tags Active Camouflage 0, Complete, Concealable, Environmental 1, Hard 1, Soft 1
- The vision enhancement augmentation (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 289)
- Grippers using secreted gel (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 294)
- Enhanced Physique

Diplomat biosuits are omnivorous, with a strong preference for vegetables and fungi. Although the biosuit can operate on as little as one meal per day, optimal performance requires frequent, smaller meals.

The diplomat biosuit has three Injury Conditions: Bruised, Injured, and Maimed.

### BASIC WARRIOR BIOSUIT

The basic warrior is taller than the diplomat and thick with muscles. Smooth keratin scales cover almost its entire body. Calloused skin stretches across the biosuit's palms, feet, and inside the bends of joints. The scales and skin of the warrior biosuit are naturally radiation-resistant. Unlike the diplomat, the basic warrior suit includes weaponry.

The warrior biosuit possesses the following features:

- Armor with the tags Active Camouflage 0, Complete, Environmental 2 (radiation), Hard 2, Soft 2
- The vision enhancement augmentation (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 289)
- Grippers using secreted gel (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 294)
- Enhanced Physique
- Any two biosuit weapons (see p. XX)

Warrior biosuits are omnivorous, with a strong preference for meat. The warrior biosuit has an extremely efficient digestive system, allowing the biosuit to eat less frequently.

## BIOSUIT EDGES

The Qin biosuits are not machines. They are symbionts, living creatures with innate physical capabilities. As Qin become more comfortable within their biosuits, they can learn to manipulate its functions and enhance its capabilities.

Qin can learn Edges they can only access while within their biosuit. If the biosuit dies, Qin can learn these same Edges for a new biosuit at no additional cost, but the process requires several days of practice. Biosuit Edges costs 2 Experience per dot. If this Edge is also a Path Edge for the Qin, reduce this cost to 1 Experience per dot. The list below contains the Edges Qin biosuits can take.

- Adrenal Spike
- Forceful Martial Arts
- Free Running
- Hair-Trigger Reflexes
- Hardy
- Keen Sense (including taste, which Qin do not have outside their biosuits)
- Precise Martial Arts

The warrior biosuit has four Injury Conditions: Bruised, Injured x2, and Maimed.

# INFILTRATION BIOSUITS

The infiltration biosuit is a plant capable of a profound degree of shapeshifting. Nicknamed the "omniplant" by humans, this carnivorous plant-like organism consists of tissues that can swiftly and radically change their shape, color, and even cell structures, linked together by nanoscopic filaments as strong as steel cable and as flexible as a spider web. The omniplant creates a wide variety of lures to attract different types of prey animals.

Cinereous Ever-Circling Mind Ken was the first to collect cells from the bouquet grove and reprogram them to assume different forms. Over time, their team developed the first infiltration biosuit. Eventually, Cinereous discovered how to induce this life form to transform in far more drastic ways than the original plant could. It can now mimic bone, skin, flesh, hair, and even blood as needed. The filaments among the elements transmit thought and commands much like a nervous system. The infiltration biosuit is indistinguishable from humans to everything except a detailed medical exam or a vitakinetic in physical contact with the biosuit.

## BASIC INFILTRATION BIOSUIT

The infiltration biosuit ranges from 1.4 to 1.9 meters tall and appears human. These biosuits possesses the same protective and gripping gel secretions as the diplomat and warrior biosuits, but Qin in infiltration biosuits tend to use human armor to better blend in. The infiltration biosuit can also secrete several clear toxins through its hands as a defensive measure.

The infiltration biosuit ecosystem can alter its appearance. As a result, a Qin in an infiltration biosuit can change the suit's appearance at will, although large changes, like disguising itself as someone else, take several hours to complete. The biosuit can change to look like any adult human, including aquas or individuals adapted to life on Mars, and can also change itself to resemble a diplomat biosuit.

The infiltration biosuit possesses the following features:

- Armor with the tags Active Camouflage 1, Complete, Environmental 1, Hard 1, Innocuous, Soft 2
- The vision enhancement augmentation (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 289)
- Grippers using secreted gel (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 294)
- Enhanced Physique
- Ability to shift shape into any human form (requires several hours)
- Poison Touch (Concealable, Formatted 1, Immune, Melee, Variable Poison 3)

The infiltration biosuit synthesizes nutrients from light and flesh. Although the biosuit prefers raw meat, it accepts cooked.

Infiltration biosuits possess three Injury Conditions: Bruised, Injured, and Maimed.

# IMPROVING BIOSUITS

When Qin upgrade their biosuits, they can focus on one of three areas: armor, weapons, and special abilities. To acquire upgrades the character must visit a location with facilities for upgrading biosuits.

## ADDITIONAL BIOSUIT ARMOR

| ARMOR TYPE | TAGS | SUIT TYPE | COST |
|---|---|---|---|
| Improved Chromatophores | Active Camouflage 1 | Diplomat or Warrior | • • |
| Defensive Spines | Defensive | Warrior | • • |
| Defensive Electrical Field | Defensive, Electrical | Any | • • • |
| Reinforced Armor | Hard Armor +1 * | Any | • • |
| Radiation Shielding | Environmental 2 (radiation) | Diplomat or Infiltration | • • |
| Subdermal Mesh | Soft Armor +1 * or +2 * | Any | • • or • • • |
| Thermal Shielding | Environmental 2 (temperature extremes) | Any | • • |

* Both Hard and Soft Armor have a maximum value of 3, regardless of the type of biosuit.

Such facilities are common on Qinshui, and all Qin colonies, and are also available at the Qin embassy on Luna, and at several secret safe houses used by Qin infiltrators on Earth, including one in Chicago, one in Shanghai, one in Jomo Kenyata, in the UAN, and one in Brasilia.

### BIOSUIT WEAPONS AND ARMOR

Qin can also supply their biosuits with additional weapons and armor. Unlike biosuit upgrades that alter the overall capabilities of the biosuit, Qin purchase these additions like they would any other gear, using the Wealth Edge. As a result, the cost of these additions is their cost in Wealth dots. Regardless of cost, additional armor requires four hours to install, and new weapons require two hours to install.

### ARMOR

Biotechnicians install additional armor or armor tags in the biosuit. Some biosuits can only accept certain types of armor. All biosuit armor automatically possesses the Complete tag. All these tags add to the tags already possessed by that type of biosuit. Finally, defensive spines retract when the wearer is not in combat, and users typically only activate the defensive electrical field in combat.

### WEAPONRY

The biosuit gains one or more built-in weapons. All these weapons automatically possess the Grappling, Psi, and Worn tags for free, as well as other tags that depend upon the weapon. Some types of biosuits can only accept certain weapons. All weapons with the Formatted tag are automatically formatted, since Qin must format biosuits to use them. In addition, weapons with the Concealable tag look just like the rest of the biosuit until the owner uses them. Biosuits can possess up to two weapons.

## BIOSUIT UPGRADES

The following are upgrades Qin can purchase for the biosuits. Each point of upgrade requires roughly two hours to install, and upgrades costs 3 Experience. Some upgrades are not compatible with some types of biosuits, see individual upgrades for details.

### BÀNLU POCKET (1 UPGRADE POINT)

In addition to possessing space for the Qin occupant, this biosuit has an additional compartment suitable for a Bànlu (p. XX), one of the Qin-made living biocomputers. Once inside the biosuit, the Bànlu can take over operation of the biosuit if the Qin is incapacitated or simply busy with other tasks. Because of the design of this compartment, the Qin can automatically take control back from the Bànlu at any time.

### BIOBUGS (1 UPGRADE POINT)

The biosuit contains a small hive of tiny organisms, called biobugs, that it can release as miniature spies. Each biobug is the size of a small gnat and has a noetic link to the biosuit and its user. These biobugs can crawl or fly with a speed of 1, and the Qin can see, hear, and smell what they do at a range equal to their Attunement range. If the biosuit moves out of Attunement range, the biobugs remain stationary, but keep observing for up to six hours, and can transmit this information if the user comes back in range. After this time, biobugs die and swiftly decompose,

## BIOSUIT WEAPONS

| WEAPON | EN | DAMAGE TYPE | RANGE | TAGS | SUIT TYPE | COST |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Biolaser (small) | 2 | Ballistic | Short | Concealable, Formatted, Piercing, Ranged | Any | • |
| Biolaser (large) | 3 | Ballistic | Short-Long | Beam, Destructive, Formatted 2, Ranged, Tactical Sight | Warrior | • • • |
| Flechette Gun | 4 | Ballistic | Short | Formatted, Ranged, Silent, Spread, Variable Ammo 3 | Warrior | • • • |
| Large Sonic Emitter | 4 | Sonic | Short | Formatted, Optionally Non-Lethal 3, Ranged, Sonic | Warrior | • • |
| Poison Touch | 2 | Poison | Close | Concealable, Formatted, Immune, Melee, Variable Poison 3 | Any | • • • |
| Retractable Claws | 2 | Edged | Close | Concealable, Formatted, Melee, Piercing | Any | • |
| Sonic Emitter | 2 | Sonic | Short | Concealable, Optionally Non-Lethal 2, Ranged, Sonic | Any | • • |
| Taser Touch | 2 | Electrical | Close | Concealable, Electrical, Immune, Melee, Non-Lethal 2 | Any | • • |

leaving no useful trace evidence. Biobugs have sufficient instincts to physically conceal themselves. When a biobug is stationary, any rolls to notice it have a Difficulty of 5, and require the individual to be actively searching the area. These rolls become Difficulty 3 if the biobug is walking, and Difficulty 2 when flying.

### BIOLUMINESCENCE (1 UPGRADE POINT)

The biosuit's chromatophores can now also emit bioluminescent light. The character can focus this effect on a specific body part to use like a flashlight or for performative effect. If the Qin allows the glow to spread over their body, they can illuminate a two-meter radius around themselves.

Strobing this light allows the Qin to emit brighter, even blinding blasts. The player rolls Technology + Cunning to blind everyone in a three-meter radius around their character. If the player succeeds, each character within the strobe's radius, both friend and foe, increases the Difficulty of their next action by +1 because the light temporarily blinds them. This increased Difficulty only affects actions where the target needs to see.

The player may spend additional successes to increase this Difficulty (one success per additional +1 Difficulty), lengthen the period of blindness by one round (one success; may only do this once per use of power), or expand the area of effect (one success per meter of radius added). If desired, the Qin can cause the suit to emit the strobing light only on one side. Doing so protects anyone on the other side of the biosuit from the strobe.

### BIOKINESIS COMPATIBILITY (1 UPGRADE POINT PER MODE)

Noetically powerful Qin can learn up to two dots in each biokinesis Mode, but cannot use these powers on most biosuits. However, Qin can modify their biosuits to include noetic linkages that permit the wearer to use biokinesis to alter them as easily as they can alter their own body. The user must purchase compatibility with each biokinesis Mode separately, and no biosuit can accommodate compatibility with more than two biokinesis Modes. These upgrades are useless to Qin who do not know biokinesis.

### CLOSED SYSTEM (1 UPGRADE POINT)

The biosuit, and the Qin inside of it, can spend extended periods of time without air, food, or water. As long as the biosuit is exposed to sunlight, it can go up to 30 days without air, food, or water. However, to keep the biosuit's metabolism in balance, the user

must commit 1 Psi point and keep it committed as long as the biosuit lacks access to air, food, or water. If necessary, the user can easily carry sufficient nutrients in a small pack to permit the biosuit and its user to survive for more than six months.

## Enhanced Flexibility (1 Upgrade Point)

**Requirement:** Diplomat or infiltration biosuits only

The Qin has increased the biosuit's flexibility to the point of being able to twist the biosuit into small, tight configurations or to stretch just a bit further to reach an object. Qin taking advantage of their biosuit's flexibility gain 2 Enhancement.

## Enhanced Leaping (2 Upgrade Points)

The Qin has increased the strength of the biosuit's legs. This allows the Qin to leap greater distances. The biosuit can leap up to Short range horizontally and up to five meters vertically without rolling dice.

## Enhanced Strength (2 Upgrade Points)

**Requirement:** Warrior biosuits only

The Qin has adapted the musculature of their biosuit to emphasize its strength. After calculating the difference in Scale for moving an object (**Trinity Continuum Corebook**, p. 74), the character subtracts one. In addition, after a successful Close Combat attack, the character may purchase the Critical Stunt (**Trinity Continuum Corebook**, p. 104) for 2 successes instead of 4.

## Energy Boost (1 Upgrade Point)

**Requirement:** Infiltration or warrior biosuits only

The Qin has learned to manipulate the biosuit's internal chemicals to release a shot of adrenaline. This gives the biosuit an extra burst of strength or speed during physical exertion. The character adds two dice to their roll for their next physical action. After completing the action, the strain of coming down from the adrenaline high and having pushed too far takes their toll on the biosuit. The character marks off the lowest remaining Injury Condition from the biosuit.

## Extra Processing Power (2 Upgrade Points)

The Qin uses the biosuit's nervous system to increase the speed and capacity of their own thoughts. The character must choose one of the below options to dedicate their biosuit's brain toward. Qin can take this upgrade only once for a particular biosuit.

- **Complex Analysis.** The Qin is always working on solving difficult puzzles and riddles or understanding research. The character gains one milestone automatically for all complex actions involving Enigmas.
- **Danger Calculator.** During battle, the Qin keeps track of what they believe to be the greatest danger around them. Once per scene, the character tags one antagonist as the greatest danger to them. They gain a +2 Enhancement on all defensive actions against that antagonist during the scene.
- **Situational Awareness.** The Qin cannot be surprised by hazards, such as a hole in a walkway or a falling piece of machinery. The character also receives a +2 Enhancement to Larceny when sneaking since they are extra aware of the terrain and people around them.

## Harmless (1 Upgrade Point)

**Requirement:** Diplomat biosuits only

The Qin, leveraging the human fascination for cute animals, engineered the biosuit to enhance the features that generate feelings of protectiveness in humans. This also causes humans to underestimate the Qin. Whenever appearing cute and harmless would help in an endeavor, gain +2 Enhancement.

## Microexpression Engineer (2 Upgrade Points)

**Requirement:** Infiltration biosuits only

The Qin has learned to mimic human microexpressions and weaponizes this knowledge to reassure humans of their sincerity, even when lying. The character gains a +2 Enhancement when convincing a human that they are sincere, whether they are or not.

| PROPULSION TYPE | DESCRIPTION | SUIT TYPE | UPGRADE COST |
|---|---|---|---|
| Running | Running Speed 2 | Any | 1 |
| Running (improved) | Running Speed 3 | Warrior or Infiltration | 2 |
| Swimming | Swimming Speed 2 | Any | 1 |
| Improved Swimming | Swimming Speed 3 | Any | 2 |
| Space Propulsion | Space Speed [2] and all the features of the SMP | Diplomat or Warrior | 2 |

## PAIN BLOCKS (1 UPGRADE POINT)

When the biosuit suffers damage, the Qin inside can temporarily block the pain receptors. At the start of their turn, the player spends an action to roll Integrity + Stamina to create a pool of successes. Then, and at the start of each subsequent turn until the pool is empty, the player may spend a success to ignore one of their biosuit's Injury Conditions, no matter how severe, for that round. A character can ignore up to two Injury Conditions at a time.

## PROJECTED IMAGES (1 UPGRADE POINT)

**Requirement:** Bioluminescence

The Qin has gained control over the light their suit can emit. They can control the light sufficiently that they can now project text, images against a surface, and three-dimensional holograms. These holograms glow slightly and are faintly translucent, so they do not look real upon close examination.

Qin may use these images to silently share memories or information, trick a target by projecting a shadow or other false image, or distract an enemy combatant. The character gains +1 Enhancement when using Projected Images to trick or distract someone. The character loses this Enhancement if their target figures out these images are not real.

## PROPULSION (1–2 UPGRADE POINTS PER PROPULSION TYPE)

The biosuit is modified so that it can move or move faster in a particular environment. The available types of propulsion depend up suit type. Suits with improved running have enhanced leg musculature, suits with improved swimming have similar improvements, along with deployable fins. Space propulsion uses ultra-compact gravito-magnetic propulsion.

Biosuit space propulsion permits the user to travel at Space Speed [2] in zero gravity, and duplicates the effects of the space maneuver pack (SMP) (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 291) in higher gravity. Using space propulsion requires 1 Psi point per scene. However, the user can fully recover this Psi point used before having to power it again, permitting long voyages. No other propulsion upgrades require spending Psi points.

## PSIONIC ENHANCEMENT (1 UPGRADE POINT)

The suit contains the Qin equivalent of the interface augmentation device (IAD) (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 290). Qin can only use IADs for telepathy, or in one of the Auxiliary Modes they possess. Also, inherent limitations prevent Qin from installing or otherwise using either this upgrade or a normal IAD for more than one Aptitude.

## RAPID TRANSFORMATION (2 UPGRADE POINTS)

**Requirement:** Infiltration biosuits only

Most infiltration biosuits require several hours to make major changes in their appearance. This biosuit's transformations only require two full rounds to complete any transformation. In addition, the biosuit has +2 Enhancement to imitate specific individuals, as long as the Qin has carefully observed the individual and possesses a Psionic Connection (**Trinity Continuum: Æon**, p. 204) to them.

## SHARED RECOVERY (1 UPGRADE POINT)

The Qin and biosuit share resources when recovering from injuries. When recovering from a Status Condition or while resisting continuous damage, the character only needs to meet half of the required successes, rounded-up, each time the player must make such a roll. This affects the biosuit and Qin inside and covers both mental and physical damage.

### Vocal Mimicry (1 Upgrade Point)

The biosuit possesses an enhanced voice box that allows it to create different tones, pitches, and resonances. The Qin can mimic another's voice or almost any other sound, like an alarm klaxon, a weapon powering up, or exceedingly realistic animal noises well enough to fool others. The character gains a +1 Enhancement to Larceny whenever this ability is useful.

# Storyguiding the Qin

The enigmatic Qin are humanity's closest allies in exploring the secrets of the physical and subquantum universes, but they're far from an open book. Secretive to the point of paranoia, the Qin rarely reveal the whole truth to even their closest human friends and allies. Inhuman slugs hidden behind layers of humanlike flesh, few humans even realize exactly how alien the Qin are.

Introducing Qin into a chronicle (or a campaign) as more than two-dimensional secondary characters requires some work from the Storyguide and players, but it's worth it. The Qin's alien nature makes them interesting. They aren't simply human beings with latex prosthetics — although groups can play them that way if they want. The Qin experience the universe differently from humans, and don't carry the same assumptions, cultural norms, or prejudices that humans take for granted. No, the Qin make alien assumptions, have a different view of what constitutes normal behavior, and have their own prejudices. These shape the way Qin interact with each other and with humanity.

## The Qin Experience

Stepping into the biosuited shoes of a Qin first involves examining what differentiates these aliens from humans. Evolutionary and survival factors far different from those on Earth drove the development of the species humanity discovered in the 22nd century. Understanding these pressures, and what came from them, can greatly assist roleplaying how a Qin might react to any given situation. Qin divide themselves along Body, Mind, and Society castes (**Trinity Continuum: *Æon,*** p. 351) based on interests and abilities. These divisions provide helpful lenses to see the Qin and gain greater understanding of their drives, though all Qin embody the aspects below to some degree.

### Body

Qin of the Body caste focus on the physical world around them, surviving within it and striving to protect and advance the Qin species through action. Demonstrating Body when roleplaying Qin involves projecting unflappable strength and confidence in their own abilities, taking a considered, measured approach to dangerous situations but also a complete willingness to engage once a plan is in place, and giving the appearance of quickly having the answers to the unforeseen but predictable events that unfold.

**Qin are Weak:** The Qin find strength through overcoming their inherent weakness. Soft-bodied slugs have no business conquering their own planet, let alone colonizing others, but the Qin did so anyway. In their own way, the Qin share this trait with humanity — both species have little to stand against the predators who would devour them, or the environmental dangers that would destroy them, but neither species let this get in their way. This similarity is a double-edged sword for the Qin with humanity. They respect humans for overcoming similar hardships and challenges, but because the Qin know what it is to conquer overwhelming challenges, they'll never fully trust humanity — much as they'd expect humans to never fully trust the Qin.

**Qin are Old:** 14,000 years ago, when ancient human wars first left their mark on the historic record, the Qin departed their planet and took to the void. The species has thrived since this time, enduring without succumbing to the self-destruction so many other species experienced. The Qin conquered the vast distances between stars despite lacking faster-than-light travel. Qin-colonized space progressed over this period, with the delays in transport and communications meaning colonies outside the Qinshui system developed as autonomous worlds with their own practices and cultural shifts. Though the Qin are broadly aware of the differences between their home world culture and those of the outlier planets, these differences remain mostly an abstract concept. Now with the alliance with humanity, this must change. The Qin must deal with their own culture shock in addition to adapting to

dealing with humans. Whether humans would even notice the differences between one Qin culture and another is still unknown.

**Qin are Cautious:** The Qin didn't become an ancient space-faring, multi-system species by taking unnecessary risks. Throughout their history, Qin clashed with creatures bigger and stronger, and triumphed. They've fought creatures with savage natural weaponry and rock-hard armor and defeated them all. These victories came through united purpose, teamwork, and planning. The Qin defeated all their foes by studying them closely, learning their weaknesses, and carefully deciding when and how to take best advantage of this. Qin hate acting quickly or without due planning. Often when they give the appearance of reacting in the moment and adjusting to changing situations it's because they've hypothesized every challenge they can conceive and planned the best responses. When someone catches the Qin off guard — such as when the first human ship suddenly appears in orbit above Qinshui — individuals and groups may react in ways that other groups or Houses won't harmoniously accept. This uncertainty leads to competing interests and goals rippling through Qin society, possibly for years.

## MIND

Qin of the Mind caste explore their innate power and command over nature and apply this to overcoming the challenges faced by their species. They plan for the future and push at new frontiers. Demonstrating Mind when roleplaying Qin involves presenting unity with all Qin to outsiders, showing knowledge of things the individual seemingly couldn't know, having curiosity in the face of the unknown, wanting to understand the reasons and causes behind everything, and seeming to have a living tool available for every situation, or the ability to quickly grow whatever is needed.

**Qin are Telepaths:** Every Qin is a natural psion; telepathy comes as naturally to them as speaking does to humans. Telepathy is more than just communication for the Qin. They spend much of their time in telepathic Networks, overlapping from Qin to Qin covering thousands of individuals with central nodes acting as open exchanges between others. This shared experience opens a Qin's inner thoughts and feelings to others and drops the barriers humans take for granted. Qin can often easily see precisely what their colleagues believe and want to do about a situation. They don't need

to waste precious time arguing over courses of action, and where they do have disagreements, resolution occurs at the speed of thought. This gave Qin the evolutionary advantage to overcome all other competitors and dominate their planet, coordinating their actions in uncanny unity that even human telepaths find difficult to comprehend.

**Qin are Curious:** Qin love to learn, especially when they're aware of a question they don't know the answer to. Telepathy gives the Qin access to so much knowledge and awareness of the minds around them, and not knowing something is like an itch the Qin just can't scratch. This thirst for understanding drives their species forward. Unlike humans, the Qin don't feel the need to have to be the one who discovers the answers, through telepathy they share the thrill and pleasure of discovery that the individual felt at the moment of triumph. Nor do Qin shy away from being the one who discovers, if a Qin is in the right place and time then it is the one who acts and passes the experience onwards. The need for discovery fuels the Qin's political games and social mores, working to deceive each other in unimaginably difficult circumstances. They don't usually become frustrated at their ignorance as mystery and secrets are the rarest commodity and the one most treasured when found.

**Qin are Biological:** The Qin have mastered manipulation of biological systems, but do not create, use, or even fully understand hardtech. They have altered every living creature on Qinshui to suit their needs. The Qin view all creatures as potential tools and equipment. These aliens see life as something they can and should modify into service as needed. They don't share human concepts of conservation or preservation. Instead, they keep alive creatures with useful traits that can best serve the Qin's needs, either now or in future. They may leave creatures with no apparent use or current purpose to their own environments until the aliens identify a use, but more often these plants or animals occupy an environment the Qin want for other purposes. In these instances, the Qin harvest genetic and noetic samples to recreate the species when needed, paving the way to remove the current creatures. Qin mean no disrespect in viewing other creatures this way. They try to not consider their allies as potentially useful arrangements of genetic traits, but when they saw what human psions could do, the Qin couldn't help but arrange to collect discrete, non-invasive samples whenever possible.

## SOCIETY

Those Qin identifying with the Society caste bind the species together and keep it functioning. Without the structures laid down by the Society caste, the Qin wouldn't have harnessed the true strength of their advantages over other creatures on Qinshui and wouldn't have the drive to reach for the stars. Demonstrating Society when roleplaying Qin involves giving away as little as possible without carefully considering whether others need to know additional details. Even then they only provide the bare minimum of information, by giving the impression that the Qin knows more than it admits to, and by working with words, influence, and manipulating situations to maneuver those you engage with — friend or foe — to best suit the Qin's needs.

**Qin are Private:** Qin don't like giving away their own secrets, as individuals have so few that are truly theirs. Frequent telepathic communication with friends, families, and colleagues makes every Qin an almost open book, at least to other Qin. Their emotions, triumphs, failures, and challenges are obvious for anyone to sense. Learning how to keep something hidden despite the openness is highly valued by the Qin, a difficult and envious skill to master. The most skilled Qin can keep portions of their thoughts private while appearing to be telepathically transparent with everyone they encounter. Other Qin respect those who manage this, rather than regarding them with the suspicion and mistrust that most humans would feel in the same situation.

**Qin are Deceptive:** Humans view deception as a negative personality trait, but Qin see it far differently. Young Qin wear their hearts on their sleeves, as natural telepaths with limited experience in separating their inner selves from everything else. Only through maturity, practice, and skill do Qin learn to hide portions of themselves away from each other, even though individual telepathic contact and group Networks. These arts of deception separate brash youthfulness from an age of maturity, like a human being considered old enough to vote, consume alcohol, or any one of dozens of different rites of passage the Qin have observed in their study of humans. Some Qin take this separation further, demonstrating a level of mastery at deception like an apprentice achieving a masterwork and becoming truly adept at their trade. These Qin don't simply avoid topics or conceal their opinions to other Qin while leaving an obvious mental "space" where the opinion would be. True Society masters can

present a wholly false representation of a subject while concealing their innermost thoughts. Qin value deception as the mark of skill, experience, and maturity, but never let it get in the way of anything important. In emergencies or when the stakes are high, Qin swiftly drop their deceptions.

**Qin are Political:** In practicing deception from a base of absolute truth, Qin love politics. Mastering the art of portraying one thing and achieving your goals while giving every appearance of wanting something else is a masterpiece of theatre that delights the Qin. Qin maneuver with each other, and the Houses work to gain advantage without suffering loss. Qin delight in their successes but don't begrudge political victors — the other Qin simply played the game better and were more deserving this time. When engaging with humans, Qin diplomats indulge in their political natures and enjoy the back and forth with their allies. They love when humans mange to win a complicated maneuver and don't understand why humans take offense when the Qin win in turn. Qin manipulate and deceive humans not out of disrespect, but because the Qin do respect humanity. Most Qin view humans as different-but-equal to the Qin and therefore treat them as such. To do less and not be manipulative would be disrespectful to their allies.

### NON-QIN QUALITIES

In addition to the facets that show what Qin are, their lack of certain human traits also helps define them. These areas can make the Qin even more alien as they're aspects that are intrinsic to or taken for granted by many modern humans, and still linger to a greater or lesser degree for people in the 22nd century. Demonstrating the absence of these qualities when roleplaying Qin involves showing confusion or hesitation when humans act or make decisions based on them, and possibly asking awkward questions to develop an understanding of what relevance or advantage one aspect has over another.

**Qin are not Gendered:** Every Qin can become pregnant or impregnate another, though not at the same time. Qin infants don't have mothers or fathers; they have two parents considered equally important in all aspects of their upbringing. The concept of giving any consideration to what genitals an individual may carry, or how they choose to use them is foreign and completely baffling to the Qin. Though the aliens mimic human shapes through their biosuits they still struggle with the human misconception that there could be significant performance differences between either gender in most professions or endeavors. This social observation and lack of actual understanding leads to many Qin unfamiliar with humans wearing different biosuits for the first few encounters to gauge the reactions and try to calibrate what works best for an individual. Qin more experienced with human norms instead learn that humans value the familiar, so wear biosuits of consistent appearance and gender to present a comforting lie and accommodate these allies.

**Qin are not Bipedal Mammals:** Few humans consider how much they anthropomorphize the world around them, which fascinates the Qin. Humans unconsciously consider the bipedal, binocular, five-fingered, four-limbed form to be a universal preference across the universe and search for it in their explorations. Qin studies of human mythology marvel at the number of gods and monsters who possessed humanlike traits. Qin accompanying human explorations notice that their companions almost immediately begin describing artifacts, relics, and ruins in terms of how they compare to human equivalents and assume that whatever extinct species probably shared many human traits. Humans even accepted the Qin's biosuits as obvious and true representations of the aliens for several years, before discovering and accepting the truth. Qin assume very little across the galaxy resembles Qin but are happy to take what they find and adapt their biological interfaces to make use of it. Humans take what they find and work to adapt it to suit human sizes and shapes. In the face of so many planets filled with life that is exceedingly alien to both humans and Qin, the Qin find this trait particularly baffling.

## DRAMATIC TENSIONS

Understanding how Qin think, act, and differ from humans is one half of having them be a compelling, realistic part of a campaign. The other half is looking at the Qin's goals and drives as the universe changes around them. Since meeting humanity, the Qin have entered what is possibly the most tumultuous phase of their entire history. The following are some of the key issues affecting the Qin and shaping their future alongside their allies.

## SEPARATE COLONIES, UNITED

The realities and considerations of an empire once divided but now potentially united is a flashpoint of political drama for Qin stories. The Qin have endured thousands of years of colonizing the habitable systems around Qinshui at sub-light speeds. Qin occupying a single planet such as Qinshui — or orbital habitats around the planet — enjoy a unity of mind, emotion, and purpose when needed. Beyond this, Qin within the same system mostly share common culture and perspective as news, developments, and changes pass throughout the system in hours at most through electromagnetic and telepathic communications. Conversely, the Qin cultures of extrasolar colonies, such as Palket and Valat, diverged from the Qinshui norm due to limitations of light speed communications enforcing years-long delays in dialogue and negotiations. With only periodic direction from the homeworld, and unique local conditions that Qinshui had no intimate experience with, Qin colonies experienced cultural drifts like pre-industrial human colonies separated by oceans that took months to cross.

Now, the Qin-human alliance can travel between Qin worlds in an instant, creating tensions and confusion of a sort that this species has never faced before. Qin within the Qinshui system were happy mostly ignoring or dismissing the strange expectations and viewpoints of other Qin from far off places, but now they need to seriously think on how to incorporate the thoughts and customs of a "backwards" colony like Valat. More alarmingly, as a species of telepaths accustomed to sharing so much, "mainstream" Qin are considering whether they even tell Valatian Qin of the existence and alliance with humanity.

## BIOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

Qin excel at biological manipulation and creating living tools to serve almost any function. Their skill with biotechnology fascinates humanity, whose own steps towards biotech has already yielded incredible results but are the work of apprentices compared with masters in the craft. This demonstrable skill over every genome but their own leads humans to wonder why the Qin haven't improved their psionic potential to meet their needs like they've changed every other aspect of their environment. Contact with the humans and studying the growth of their psionic power from apparently nothing has led some Qin to wonder the same thing.

Qin philosophy and society consider it an unalterable truth that their psionic powers are inherently limited to what they currently have, and that no amount of genetic tinkering can change this. Qin as a psionic species supposedly attained their maximum psionic potential. The Qin have believed this for thousands of years — until 15 years ago no Qin even questioned it, which was precisely the outcome the Doyen desired. The isolated years when the human teleporters disappeared, stranding Qin among humanity, sparked the beginnings of a rebellion against long-held truths.

Following recontact and return to Qinshui, the human experience has sent a ripple of self-reflection among the population, spreading faster through Qin communities than any human could conceive. The Qin have studied (as much as possible) the role of the Prometheus Effect in creating human psions of tremendous power. They've had direct experience with humanity's creativity and willingness to go outside established norms to accomplish what everyone previously considered impossible. And perhaps most importantly though the Qin don't realize it, they finally have a unique freedom to reinvent themselves while the Doyen are distracted and focused on the humans, thereby neglecting their harmful interventions that kept the Qin ignorantly subjugated.

Carefully, possibly slowly, enterprising Qin willing to indulge in humanlike behavior and challenge societal norms may reach out to their human allies. The partnership between Qin expertise and human ingenuity could spark an incredible new power in the galaxy, possibly to rival the Doyen themselves.

# THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One factor is intrinsic to the other current destabilizing influences on Qin culture — humanity. Humans are so many things that Qin are not, but still the two species share a genuine alliance. Although the Qin aren't of one mind about everything, and they have a range of opinions about humans and the role they play in the galaxy, most Qin are reasonably comfortable having humanity as powerful allies rather than powerful enemies. The isolated years without teleporters didn't just spark a rebellious creative streak in the Qin, it gave them over five years of observing the humans up close, seeing their highs and lows and how they reacted to the stress of being alone and possibly never returning home. Through this — and the experiences of the

Qin stranded in Earth space — the aliens came to deeply respect humanity and believe in the purity of their engagement with the Qin. With the teleporters' return and the advent of the Leviathan jump ships, many Qin are embracing the unknown and joining human expeditions to experience the wonder of the galaxy through youthful human eyes — sometimes literally, with telepathy and cooperation.

## LIVING ALONGSIDE HUMANS

A lone Qin — or a small group — operating among large numbers of humans certainly lives in interesting times, surrounded by aliens who attract chaos and seem to live with near complete disregard for safety or caution. These Qin benefit from increased privacy as few humans would try to push past its barriers with more than words, which they can easily deflect. The Qin are intensely curious about the near randomness of human activity and the lack of planning that accompanies it. Humans largely react to situations as they occur, which keeps Qin in constant discomfort. Humans do practically none of what Qin would consider reasonable planning or forethought. The Qin may try to fill this gap, suggesting potential scenarios and how the group would deal with them, followed by whatever scenarios develop from that, and so forth. The Qin is likely to find that humans quickly become bored with the levels of theorizing that Qin do to feel comfortable with a scenario. For the Qin, operating as part of this group is a roller-coaster ride of uncertainty and every-impending havoc.

One specific scenario where Qin feel more comfortable operating among humans is their deep cover missions pretending to be humans. This comfort comes from the feeling of control the Qin brings to the mission. Operating among humans in a human-appearance infiltration biosuit that would fool all but the most dedicated scanners — psi or hardtech — appeals to the Qin's desire for deception, social maneuvering, and curiosity. While the Qin still can't account for the random events that seem to befall every human on an apparently endless basis, it can choose to a degree how much it engages with those humans and events.

## LIVING ALONGSIDE QIN

Conversely, a small group of humans living among the Qin are going to feel somewhat like lab rats under constant scrutiny. The Qin are incredibly curious about how the humans think and act. Qin are willing to question the humans' innermost thoughts and prompt them to think not only about how they act, but why they do. No matter what response the humans give, they'll gain the impression that the Qin don't believe them, or that they're only telling half-truths. Qin mean no disrespect from this suspicion. Deception and bluffs are part of Qin standard practice; they love political games, deception, and taking nothing at face value. Qin acting like the humans have secrets that they won't share are Qin treating humans as equals. Despite how it feels for the humans, it's an indication that the Qin are becoming more comfortable and relaxed around them.

Qin may also tend to categorize their human companions based on the skills and abilities they've disclosed and deliberately exclude them from other situations. To a species divided by House and caste this isn't impolite but merely a recognition of the humans' strengths. With every device being biological, Qin often have difficulty not regarding other creatures as potential tools.

# NEW MYSTERIES. NEW WORLDS. NEW ALIENS. AND ALIEN HEROES!

Distant Worlds expands the setting of Trinity Continuum: Æon with new worlds, new alien mysteries, and rules for playing actual aliens, the secretive telepathic Qin.

Distant Worlds requires both Trinity Continuum: Æon and the Trinity Continuum Corebook to play. Inside, you will find:

- Further information about the eight extra-solar worlds described in Trinity Continuum: Æon, including new dangers and new opportunities for adventure.
- Detailed write-ups of 10 new planets, including one that is home to a recently contacted intelligent alien species.
- New technologies for interstellar travel and colonization, as well as a wealth of new devices created by aliens, and new Edges and Paths specifically for interstellar explorers and settlers.
- The secrets of humanity's alien allies, the mysterious Qin. This section includes descriptions of four Qin interstellar colonies as well as rules for creating and playing Qin characters and for designing and using custom-made Qin biosuits.

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